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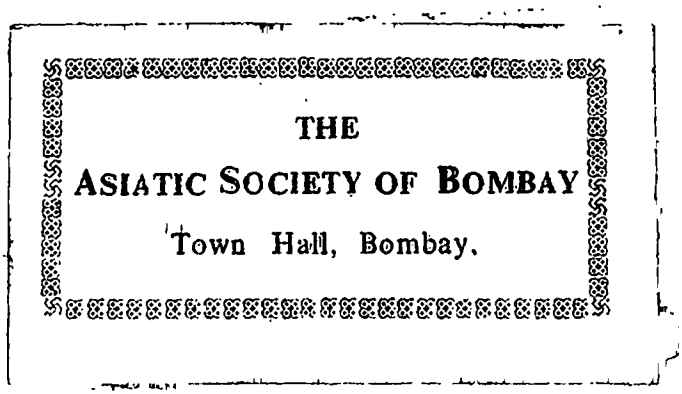

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HORÆ HOMILETICÆ,

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UPON

The Whole Scriptures.

110967

BY

THE REV. C. SIMEON, M.A.

FELLOW OF KING'S COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.

VOL. XI.

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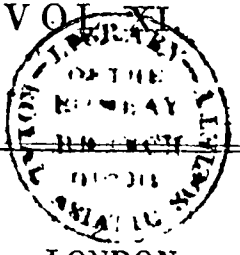

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INDEX *to* SERMONS ON PARTICULAR OCCASIONS.

MCXXXVI.

THE DUTY OF PATIENCE.

Jam. i. 2—4. *My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.*

WE at this time are scarcely able to form a conception of the state of the Church in the Apostolic age. Christianity amongst us is attended with none of the evils to which the primitive professors of it were exposed. But to what is this owing? Is Christianity altered at all? or is it less offensive than it was in the eyes of ungodly men? No: it is the same as ever: and, if those who profess it be not despised and hated now as they were in former times, it is because they retain "the form only of godliness, and have none of its power." Let persons enter into the spirit of Christianity now, as the Christians did in the Apostles' days, and they will be treated precisely as they were, so far at least as the laws of the land will admit of it: and, if they be not persecuted unto death, it will not be from there being any more love to piety in the carnal heart now, than there was then; but from the greater protection which is afforded by the laws of the land, and from a spirit of toleration which modern usages have established. Real vital godliness was then universally hated; and it is so still. It was not to the Jewish converts in Palestine only that St. James wrote, but "to the twelve tribes who were scattered abroad." Religion was persecuted not by one party only, but by every

party and in every place: and it is still, in every place, "to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness:" and all who will cultivate it will sooner or later need to have the consolations of our text administered to them for their support.

In the words which we have read, we see,

I. The appointed portion of God's people—

In former ages they were hated for righteousness' sake—

[Go back to the time of Abel. You well know that he was murdered by his own brother Cain. And what was the ground of Cain's enmity against him? We are informed on infallible authority: "Cain slew his brother, because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous[a]." Descend through all successive ages, and you will still find the same enmity subsisting between the seed of the woman, and the seed of the serpent. As light and darkness, so Christ and Belial, both in themselves and in their members, ever have been, and ever must be, opposed to each other[b]. As to the *diversity* of trials to which the godly have been exposed, we need look no further than to the short summary given us in the 11th chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews: "Some were tortured: others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover, of bonds and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheep-skins and goat-skins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented:" (yes, they were so treated, "of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth[c]." Come we to the time of Christ and his Apostles: it might be hoped that their superior light and piety, and the innumerable miracles with which their divine commission was confirmed, would screen them from such evil treatment; and especially that the Lord Jesus Christ, whose character was so spotless, and whose wisdom was infinite, should be able to overcome the prejudices of a blind infatuated world. But they were only the more exposed to the taunts and cruelty of the ungodly in proportion as their light shined with the brighter splendor. And all who in the first ages of the Church became their followers, were, in their measure, subjected to the same trials, and made to drink of the same bitter cup.]

The same treatment they meet with in the present day—

[We have observed, that a mere form of piety will pass without

[a] 1 John iii. 12. [b] 2 Cor. vi. 14, 15. [c] Heb. xi. 35—38.

without opposition: but real, vital godliness, will subject us to reproach at this day, as much as ever: "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution[d]." That kind of godliness which *arises from self*, and *terminates in self*, will bring us into favour with the world: but that which is derived altogether from Christ as its proper source and Author, and is exercised altogether for the advancement of his glory, is, and ever will be, odious in the eyes of the ungodly: and a man who exemplifies it in his life and conversation can no more escape persecution than Christ himself could. To receive all from Christ, and to do all for Christ, is the very essence of Christian piety: and, in requiring this of his followers, our blessed Lord has bequeathed to his Church a never-failing source of variance with the world. This he himself tells us: "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law: and a man's foes shall be they of his own household." Accordingly we find universally, that where a person begins to live by faith on the Lord Jesus Christ, and to devote himself to his service, all his friends and relatives will take the alarm, and try, by every method of ridicule, or menace, or persuasion, to divert him from his purpose. Let him live in an entire neglect of his soul, and no one will trouble himself about him. He may live his whole life in such a state, and not a friend will exhort him to serve the Lord: but the least approach to piety will be discouraged by every friend and relative that he has. Not that religion will be discountenanced *as religion*: some evil name must be given to it first; and then it will be reprobated *under that character*. But the very persons who hold in the highest veneration the names of the Apostles, and of the great Reformers of our Church, and who would raise shrines and monuments to departed saints, will persecute the living saints with the utmost rancour: and were the Apostles or Reformers to live again upon the earth, they would receive the very same treatment from them that they met with from the people of the age in which they lived. If they called the Master of the house Beelzebub, it is in vain for any servant of his to hope that he shall escape a similar reproach[e].]

Painful as this portion is to flesh and blood, none need to fear it, if only they attend to,

II. The Apostle's directions in relation to it—

God graciously appoints to his people this portion, in order

[d] 2 Tim. iii. 12. [e] Matt. x. 24, 25.

order to promote their spiritual welfare, and progressively to transform them into the Divine image in righteousness and true holiness. Hence St. James exhorts his afflicted brethren *to regard their trials as means to an end;* and,

1. To welcome the means—

[The proper tendency of trials is to work patience in our souls. At first indeed they operate to the production of impatience, or, rather I should say, to the eliciting of those evil dispositions which lurk in our hearts. Till we have had our pride in some measure subdued, we know not how to bear the unkindness which we meet with: we fret under it, and rage even as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke: but when we discover our weakness, we are ashamed of it, and humble ourselves before God on account of it, and implore grace from him to support us, and thus gradually become instructed by the discipline, and are at last "strengthened with all might by his Spirit unto all patience and long-suffering, with joyfulness, giving thanks unto the Father," who has wrought in us that very change of heart and life which has exposed us to the enmity of the ungodly world[f].

Now when we see what good our God designs us by these trials, we should not only be reconciled to them, but be thankful for them, and "count them just occasions for exalted joy." For, what price can be too great for so valuable an acquisition as that of a meek, submissive, and patient spirit? We submit with readiness to many things which are displeasing to flesh and blood for the advancement of our bodily health: and shall we not thankfully take the prescriptions of our heavenly Physician for the health of our souls? What if they be unpalatable to our taste? We should regard the affliction as good, when we know what benefits will ultimately result from it[g]; assured, that "the sufferings of this present life are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us[h]." When therefore we see the clouds gathering around us, we should not be alarmed, but should say rather like the countryman whose fields are burnt up with drought, Now God is about to refresh and fructify my barren heart, and his clouds shall drop fatness on my soul. What if your enemies meditate nothing but evil? Should that be of any concern to you, when you know who has engaged to overrule it all for good[i]? I say then with the Prophet, "Fear not" any menaces or preparations, how formidable soever they may appear[k]; nor complain of any trials, however oppressive

[f] Col. i. 11, 12. [g] Isai. xxvii. 9. [h] Rom. viii. 18.
[i] Rom. viii. 28. [k] Isai. viii. 12, 13.

sive they may be at the time; but rejoice in them[l], and bless God who counts you "worthy to bear" them[m], and accept them as an invaluable "gift at his hands[n]," and "take pleasure in them[o]," as knowing that they will assuredly issue in your welfare, and "in the honour of your God[p]."]

2. To cultivate the end—

[Does God design by means of trials to make you resemble Him "who was led as a sheep to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so opened he not his mouth?" Seek to experience this benefit from them; and "let patience have its perfect work in you, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing." Complain not that your trials are heavy, or of long continuance: but be more anxious to have your dross consumed, than to have the intensity of the furnace diminished. It was "through sufferings that the Lord Jesus Christ himself was made perfect[q]:" and if "*he* learned obedience by the things which he suffered[r]," will not ye be content to learn it in the same way? We are ready to think that perfection consists in *active* virtue; but God is not a whit less honoured by *passive* virtue: and when patience has so far operated upon your soul as to make you "glory in tribulations" for the Lord's sake[s], and you can say from your inmost soul, under all circumstances, "Not my will, but thine be done," you will have attained that measure of holiness which constitutes perfection; and you will ere long, as a shock of corn that is fully ripe, be treasured up in the garner of your heavenly Father. You have seen "Jesus, after having endured the cross, and despised the shame, set down at the right hand of the throne of God[t]:" be content then to "suffer with him, that in due time you may be glorified together[u]." Let this be the one object of your concern; and pray that "the God of peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus through the blood of the everlasting covenant, *would make you perfect* in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight through Christ Jesus[x]."]

ADDRESS,

1. The timid Christian—

["Who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man that shall be as grass, and forgettest the Lord thy Maker?" Oh! "fear not the oppressor, as if he were able to destroy: for where is the fury of

[l] Luke vi. 22, 23. [m] Acts v. 41. [n] Phil. i. 29.
[o] 2 Cor. xii. 10. [p] 1 Pet. iv. 14, 16. [q] Heb. ii. 10.
[r] Heb. v. 8. [s] Rom. v. 3. [t] Heb. xii. 2.
[u] Rom. viii. 17. 2 Tim. ii. 11, 12. [x] Heb. xiii. 20.

of the oppressor[x]?" Look at Pharaoh and all his host: what could they do against the God of Israel[x]? Look at Herod, when he would "stretch out his hand to vex the Church:" "he falls a prey even to worms," which eat him up alive[a]. Know that the creature is no more than "an axe or saw in your Father's hands:" and that he can do nothing, but as your Father sees fit to employ him for your good[b]. In all that he attempts, he is limited and controlled[c], and shall effect nothing which shall not subserve your eternal interests[d]. Be strong then, and of good courage: and whatever cross may lie in your way, take it up cheerfully, and bear it after your Lord and Saviour: for be well assured, that your Saviour deserves it richly at your hands———]

2. The suffering Christian—

[Shall I pity you? No: rather let me congratulate you as being made conformable to your Lord and Saviour[e]. Repeated are St. James's declarations, that sufferings for Christ's sake are subjects rather for joy than for grief. "We count them happy that endure[f]." And again, "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for, when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him[g]." Receive then trials as "the portion which God has appointed you[h];" and expect that, if your afflictions abound for Christ's sake, "so shall your consolations also abound by Christ[i];" and whatever you may lose for his sake, you shall even in this present life receive an hundred-fold more than you have lost[k]; and, in the world to come, "an accumulated weight of happiness and glory" to all eternity[l]. And when you shall have arrived at the realms of glory, it will be no grief to you that you "came out of great tribulation;" for then will "your Saviour lead you to the living fountains of bliss, and God himself will wipe away all tears from your eyes[m]."]

[x] Isai. li. 12, 13.
[a] Acts xii. 1—3, 23.
[b] Isai. x. 7, 11, 15.
[c] Rom. ix. 17.
[d] 1 Pet. i. 7.
[e] 1 Pet. iv. 12, 13.
[f] Jam. v. 11.
[g] Jam. i. 12.
[h] 1 Thess. iii. 3.
[i] 2 Cor. i. 5.
[k] Mark x. 28—30.
[l] 2 Cor. iv. 17.
[m] Rev. vii. 14—17.

MCXXXVII.

THE WAY TO OBTAIN TRUE WISDOM.

Jam. i. 5, 6. *If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering.*

WISDOM

WISDOM is necessary for the due discharge of every office of life: but it is more particularly necessary for a Christian, on account of the many difficulties to which he is subjected by his Christian profession. For no sooner does he give himself up to the service of his God, than his friends and relatives exert themselves to draw him back again to the world. Every species of temptation they lay in his way, if by any means they may effect their purpose, and divert him from the path which he has chosen. They fail not to represent to him, the injury that will arise to his reputation and worldly interests, and the pain which his new course occasions to those whose happiness he is bound to consult. Not unfrequently too parental authority is interposed to arrest his progress, and to interdict the use of such means as he has found conducive to his spiritual welfare. Those books which would best inform his mind, that society which would most strengthen his heart, and those ordinances which would most edify his soul, are all prohibited; and no alternative is left him, but to relinquish his pursuit of heavenly things, or incur the contempt and hatred of his dearest friends. What now must be done? He wishes to keep a conscience void of offence: but how can it be effected? If he is faithful to his God, he offends man: and, if he pleases man, he violates his duty to his God. The principle which he adopts is in itself plain and simple; namely, that he must obey God, and not man. But how to apply this principle is a difficulty which frequently involves him in the greatest embarrassment. If he relax in nothing, he appears absurd in the extreme: if his compliances be carried too far, he endangers his peace of mind, and the welfare of his soul. Again, in the manner of executing what his conscience dictates, he is also at a loss. He may be too bold, or too timid; too faithful, or too obsequious. The different dispositions of all with whom he has to do must be consulted, and his conduct be adapted to them in all the diversified situations in which he is called to act. But "who is sufficient for these things?" Often does he wish

wish for an experienced counsellor to advise him; and almost sit down in despair of ever attaining such a measure of wisdom as is necessary for him. It is to persons so circumstanced that St. James addresses the directions in our text. He supposes them to have "fallen into divers temptations," and to be labouring so to "possess their souls in patience," that "patience may have its perfect work, and that they may be perfect and entire wanting nothing." But how is all this to be effected? Any mariner may steer a vessel in a calm; but how shall one so inexperienced regulate it in a storm; and so regulate it, that it shall in no respect be driven out of its course? To these anxious questions the Apostle gives an answer: wherein he directs us,

I. How to seek wisdom—

True wisdom is the gift of God—

[Even earthly wisdom must in reality be traced to God as its Author. The persons who formed the Tabernacle and all its vessels derived all their skill from God[a]: and even those who move in a sphere which may be supposed to be suited to the meanest capacity, and spend their lives in the common pursuits of agriculture, can no farther approve themselves skilful in their work, than they are instructed by God himself[b]. But spiritual wisdom is still farther out of the reach of unassisted reason, because it is conversant about things "which no human eye has seen, or ear heard, or heart conceived, and which can only be revealed by the Spirit of God[c]." It is emphatically "a wisdom which is from above[d]," and which can "come only from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning[e]." The Spirit of God, whose office it is to impart it unto men, is called "the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord[f]:" and to him are we directed "to open the eyes of our understanding[g]," and to "guide us into all truth[h]:" since it is only by the unction derived from him, that we can possibly attain a spiritual discernment[i].]

To him must we look for it in earnest prayer—

[Study,

[a] Exod. xxxvi. 1, 2.
[b] Isai. xxviii 23—29.
[c] 1 Cor. ii. 9—12.
[d] Jam. iii. 17.
[e] ver. 17. with Matt. xvi. 17.
[f] Isai. xi. 2.
[g] Eph. i. 18.
[h] John xvi. 13.
[i] 1 John ii. 20, 27. & v. 20. with 1 Cor. ii. 14.

[Study, doubtless, even a study of the holy Scriptures, is necessary; because it is only by the written word that we are to regulate our course. But to study we must add humble and fervent supplication; according to that direction of Solomon, "If thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God: for the Lord giveth wisdom; out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding[k]." Accordingly we find the apostle Paul crying to God in behalf of the Ephesian Church, that "God the Father would give unto them the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Christ[l];" and, for the Colossians he prayed, that they also might by the same Spirit "be filled with the knowledge of God's will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding[m]."

And to seek it in this way we are all encouraged, both *from a general view of God's goodness*, and *from a particular and express promise.*

"God giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not:" "he opens his hand, and filleth all things living with plenteousness;" he "gives alike to the evil and the good, to the just and to the unjust." If then he give so abundantly to those who seek him *not*, "will he refuse his Holy Spirit unto them that *ask him?*" True, they are unworthy of so rich a blessing: and, as Jephthah upbraided those who requested his assistance against the Ammonites, saying to them, "Did not ye hate me, and expel me out of my father's house? and why are ye come unto me, now ye are in distress?" so might God reply to them; "Ye have resisted my Spirit, and rebelled against the light, times without number; and how can you expect that I should aid you any more?" But he will not so treat the weeping suppliant; but will surely impart unto him the blessing he desires. Of this he assures us by *an express promise:* "Let him ask of God; and *it shall be given him.*" This promise may be relied on, as may many others which he has given us to the same effect[n]——— *The time*, and *the manner*, and *the measure* in which it shall be fulfilled, must be left to God: but fulfilled it shall be to all who rest upon it. Not that a man shall be rendered infallible, or have such wisdom imparted to him as shall keep him from *every degree* of error; but so much as his necessities require, God will assuredly vouchsafe to all who seek it of him in sincerity and truth.]

That no man shall seek wisdom in vain, St. James adds a caution, from which we learn,

II. How

[k] Prov. ii. 2—6. [l] Eph. i. 16, 17. [m] Col. i. 9.
[n] John xiv. 13, 14. & xv. 7. & xvi. 23, 24.

II. How to secure the attainment of it—

"We must ask in faith, nothing wavering." Here it will be proper for me to shew,

1. What is that faith which we are called to exercise—

[It has not respect to that individual thing which we may chance to ask; for we may possibly be asking for something which God sees would be injurious to us, or, if not injurious, yet inconsistent with the ends which he has determined to accomplish. When our blessed Lord prayed for the removal of the bitter cup, and Paul for the removal of the thorn in his flesh, neither the one prayer nor the other was granted *literally*; though both were answered in the way most satisfactory to the suppliants, and most conducive to God's honour. So the specific thing which *we* ask, may be withheld: but we shall be sure of receiving something better in its stead: and it is with this latitude only that our faith must be exercised, except where there is an express promise for us to plead: and *then* we may assuredly expect that very thing to be granted to us.

Now respecting such a measure of wisdom as shall ultimately guide us through all our difficulties, we may ask with the fullest possible assurance: and in asking it, we should have no more doubt of its being given to us, than of our own existence: we should "ask in faith, nothing wavering." If we doubt at all, our doubt must arise, either from not being fully persuaded of the power of God to help us, or from some suspicion of his willingness. But to limit his power is sinful in the extreme: and to doubt his willingness is, as St. John expresses it, "to make God a liar:" for the promise in the text is to every creature under heaven who asks in faith. I well know that persons pretend to found their doubts on their own unworthiness: but this is a mere fallacy: for every man is unworthy: and, if unworthiness be such a disqualification as deprives a man of all right to expect the blessing in answer to his prayers, then no man living has any right to expect the blessing; and the promise of God is a mere nullity. Our need of wisdom is supposed in the very petition that is offered for it: and the more deeply we feel our need of it, the more willingly and more largely will God confer it upon us. In praying for it therefore, we are to ask, not on the ground of any fancied worthiness in us, but on the sole ground of its having been freely promised to us: and, in that view, we must lift up our hands, "as without wrath, so also without doubting[o]."]

2. Its certain efficiency to the desired end—

[In

[o] 1 Tim. ii. 8.

[In some circumstances, the fulfilment of the promise seems to exceed all reasonable hope, if not the limits of possibility itself. But in proportion as it seems to exceed hope, we are to "believe in hope," just as Abraham did, when the promise was given to him of a posterity as numerous as the stars of heaven[p]. Our blessed Lord has taught us this in a very striking manner. To his Disciples, who expressed their surprise that the fig-tree, which he had cursed, should wither away in one single night, he said, "Have faith in God: for verily I say unto you, that whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and *shall not doubt in his heart*, but *shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass;* he shall have whatsoever he saith. Therefore I say unto you, "*What things soever* ye desire when ye pray, *believe that ye receive them*, and ye shall have them[q]." The truth is, that God, if I may so say, feels his own honour implicated in fulfilling his own word: and therefore, if not for our sakes, yet for his own name-sake, "he will accomplish the thing which hath gone out of his mouth." Yet not for his own sake only will he do it, but for our sakes also: for, "them that honour him he will honour."]

ADDRESS,

1. Those who are unconscious of their need of wisdom—

[Though men are sensible enough of their ignorance in relation to human sciences, they almost universally fancy themselves competent to decide every thing relating to their faith or practice. But very pointed is that declaration of Solomon, "He that trusteth in his own heart, is a fool[r]." Respecting spiritual things we are all by nature blind, and need, the learned as well as the unlearned, to have our understandings opened, to understand them[s]. We all "lack wisdom" exceedingly: and to all equally would I address those words of Solomon, "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not to thine own understanding: in all thy ways acknowledge him; and he shall direct thy paths[t]"———]

2. Those who are discouraged by their want of wisdom—

[If you look either to the greatness of your difficulties, or your own insufficiency to meet them, you may well faint and fail: but if you look to God, there is no ground for discouragement at all. For, can he not "ordain strength in the mouths

[p] Rom. iv. 18—20. [q] Mark xi. 22—24. [r] Prov. xxviii. 26.
[s] Rev. iii. 17, 18. Luke xxiv. 45. [t] Prov. iii. 5, 6.

mouths of babes and sucklings[u]?" And "does he not put his treasure into earthen vessels on purpose that the excellency of the power may be seen to be of Him[x]?" See how he reproved Jeremiah for his desponding thoughts[y]: and be content to be "weak, that his strength may be perfected in your weakness[z]"———See how he reproved Peter also[a]; and be careful how you admit a doubt. If you are doubting, he warns you plainly, that "you must not expect to receive any thing of the Lord[b]:" but, if you will believe, according to your faith it shall be unto you[c]———]

[u] Ps. viii. 2. [x] 2 Cor. iv. 7. [y] Jer. i. 6, 7.
[z] 2 Cor. xii. 9. [a] Matt. xiv. 30, 31. [b] ver. 7.
[c] Matt. ix. 29.

MCXXXVIII.

THE DOUBLE-MINDED MAN EXPOSED.

Jam. i. 8. *The double-minded man is unstable in all his ways.*

IT is a generally-acknowledged truth, that the mind constitutes the man. In human friendships, an insincere profession of regard will not stand a severe trial; but will fail us, when we most need a firm support. In religion too, if the heart be not right with God, we shall never persevere amidst the difficulties and dangers with which we shall be encompassed. That our faith will be tried, is certain; and that we shall need support from above, is certain: I may add too, that, if we be "strong in faith, giving glory to God," we shall derive such aid from above, as shall carry us through all our temptations, how great soever they may be, and make us "more than conquerors" over all our enemies. But, if we are of a doubtful mind, we shall never finally maintain our stedfastness; but shall draw back when dangers threaten us, and faint when trials come upon us; for, "the double-minded man is unstable in all his ways."

Let us endeavour,

I. To ascertain the character here specified—

The Apostle is speaking solely respecting confidence in God: to that therefore we shall confine our

our observations. Were we to enter at large into the character of a "double-minded man," we should have a vast field before us, sufficient to occupy our attention through many discourses: but by adhering simply to the view proposed to us in the text, we shall best consult the scope of the Apostle's argument, and the edification of your minds.

"The double-minded man" then is one,

1. Whose reliance on God is not simple—

[There is in every man a proneness to self-dependence: and in matters of ordinary occurrence, no man, except the truly pious, will look higher than to himself for wisdom to guide him, or for strength to succour him. Even when obstacles arise which call for the intervention of a superior power, he will cry unto his God for help: but he will not "pray in faith," because he still "leans to his own understanding," and is unable to "commit his way entirely to the Lord." As there were in the days of old those who "swore by Jehovah and by Malcham too[a]," and those who "feared the Lord and yet served other gods" at the same time[b], so the double-minded man will rely on the Lord, but will rely on himself also; and make God and himself successively or conjointly the objects of his hope, as the variations of his mind, or the urgency of his necessities, may seem to require.

We must however distinguish between a prudent use of means, and a divided ground of hope: for confidence in God is on no account to supersede the use of prudent means. Jacob acted wisely in his endeavours to pacify his brother's wrath, sending presents by many successive messengers, and dividing his family, so that, if some were slain by Esau, others might escape. These precautions sprang not from any want of faith in God, but from a determination to leave nothing undone on his part which might contribute to the desired end. His confidence was not at all in the means he used, but in God, who, he hoped, would accomplish by them the purposes of his grace[c]. But where means are so used as to become a joint ground of confidence to those who use them, there is the evil complained of in the text. Such was the character of the Jews who went down to Egypt for help against their enemies. God had told them, that "in returning and rest they should be saved; that in quietness and confidence should be their strength; and that their strength was to sit still." But not able to rely on God alone, they went down to Egypt for help, and thereby provoked God to give them up to utter destruction.

[a] Zeph. i. 5. [b] 2 Kin. xvii. 33, 41.
[c] Gen. xxxii. 13—23. & xxxiii. 1—3.

tion[d]. God is a jealous God, and requires that we should trust in him *alone*, and have no confidence whatever on an arm of flesh[e].]

2. Whose confidence in God is not entire—

[Not only is there to be no reliance on the creature, but there should be no distrust of God. We should rely upon him without any doubt as to the issue of our confidence. We should view every thing, even to the falling of a sparrow, as under his controul. We should feel that there is no power or counsel against him: and that for man to defeat his purposes, is utterly impossible. We should see, that, if we trust in God, he will accomplish for us every thing that is good; and the things which are not, shall as certainly exist, as if they were already in existence[f]."

But this measure of faith is not in the double-minded man. He cannot so repose his confidence in God. He does not so realize the thought of God's universal agency, as to be able to commit every thing into his hands, and to "stand still in an assured expectation of seeing the salvation of God[g]." On the contrary, he is ever "limiting the Holy One of Israel:" and when successive trials arise, he overlooks his former deliverances, and reiterates his wonted apprehensions; like those who said, "He smote the stony rock indeed, that the waters gushed out; but can he give bread also, or provide flesh for his people[h]?"]

The character of the double-minded man will be more fully seen, whilst we proceed,

II. To mark his conduct—

"He is unstable in all his ways," and is ever liable to be turned from the truth—

1. In his principles—

[Not having such clear views of the covenant of Grace as to be able to lay hold of it, and confidently to expect all the blessings contained in it, he is ever open to the allurements of novelty, and ready, "like a child, to be tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and the cunning craftiness with which they lie in wait to deceive[i]." Matters which really are of doubtful disputation, possess in his mind an importance which does not belong to them: and he will dwell on them, to the neglect of other things which are essential to his salvation. Hence it is that heretics of every description gain such influence: and hence it is that so many, "led away by the error of the wicked, fall from their own stedfastness."

[d] Isai. xxx. 7, 15, 16. [e] Jer. xvii. 5—8. [f] Rom. iv. 17.
[g] Exod. xiv. 13, 14. [h] Ps. lxxviii. 19, 20. [i] Eph. iv. 14.

stedfastness[k]." The versatility both of the one and of the other originates in this, that they have never obtained such a knowledge of God in Christ Jesus as has brought perfect peace into their souls. They know not what God is to his people: they see not to what an extent he has pledged himself to them: they have no conception of the interest which the Lord Jesus Christ takes in them, or how indissolubly connected their happiness is with his honour and glory. Let them be well "rooted and built up in Christ, and established in the faith, as they have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving[l];" and they will "stand fast in the faith," and suffer nothing to "move them away from the hope of the Gospel."]

2. In his practice—

[The man that cannot fully confide in God will be alarmed, whenever a storm is gathering around him. Were "his mind fully stayed on God, he would be kept in perfect peace[m]; and, when menaced with the most formidable assaults, would reply, "None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto me, so that I may but finish my course with joy[n]." But the double-minded man is so terrified by his adversaries, that he dares not to proceed in the plain path of duty. Like "the stony-ground hearers, he is presently offended, and in time of temptation will fall away." How many of this description are there in every place, where the Gospel is preached in sincerity and truth! It convinces many; it calls forth many to make an open profession of their acceptance of it: but in a little time how many fair blossoms wither! how many are blown off from the tree by storms and tempests! and how many, through their unbelief, are found rotten at the core! Verily, it is rather the gleanings, than the harvest, that is brought home to reward the toil that has been bestowed upon them; so many "turn back unto perdition, and so few believe to the saving of the soul."

But it may here be asked, Are we in no case to bend to circumstances? Did not St. Paul himself diversify his modes of conduct, sometimes complying with Jewish rites, which at other times he declared to have been utterly abolished? Yea, was he not of so accommodating a disposition, that he became all things to all men, and acted as a Jew or as a Gentile, according to the society with which he mixed? Yes; he did so: but there is this great difference between his conduct and that of a double-minded man: what Paul did, he did for the benefit of others: but the compliances of the double-minded man are only for the purpose of preventing evil to himself. His compliances too were only in things of perfect indiffe-

[k] 2 Pet. iii. 17. [l] Col. ii. 6, 7. [m] Isai. xxvi. 3.
[n] Acts xx. 24.

indifference: he would not have been guilty of denying or dishonouring the Saviour on any account: but the double-minded man cares not what dishonour he brings on the Gospel, provided he may but escape the evils with which he is menaced for his adherence to it. He is "like the wave," now raised, now depressed, and driven hither and thither as the wind impels it; whilst the upright soul is as the rock, which, amidst all the storms and tempests that assail it, is unshaken and unmoved.]

Let us LEARN then from hence,

1. The vast importance of self-examination—

[Men do not easily see their own duplicity. "The heart is deceitful above all things," and readily persuades us, that our doubtful confidence in God, and our partial obedience to him, are all that is required of us. But God discerns the inmost recesses of the heart, and sees there all the latent workings of worldliness and unbelief: nor will he at the last day approve of any but those whom he can attest to have been "Israelites indeed, and without guile." As for "the fearful and unbelieving," he will assign to them no other portion than "the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone[o]." O let us fear, lest, after all our profession, "our religion prove vain," and we be found to have "deceived our own souls[p]."]

2. The indispensable necessity of being "renewed in the spirit of our minds"—

[Never, till that takes place, shall we possess "the single eye[q]," and walk before God in one undeviating path of holy obedience. We may take up a profession of religion; but instability will mark our every step. To rely on God uniformly, and to "follow him fully," are far too high attainments for the natural man. Let me then intreat you to seek of God a new heart, and to pray that he would "renew a right spirit within you." Then may you hope to be "stedfast, and immoveable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord:" and then shall you be fixed "as pillars in the Temple of your God, that shall go no more out for ever[r]."]

[o] Rev. xxi. 8. [p] Jam. i. 26. [q] Matt. vi. 23, 24.
[r] Rev. iii. 12.

MCXXXIX.

THE EFFECTS OF RELIGION ON THE DIFFERENT ORDERS OF SOCIETY.

Jam. i. 9, 10. *Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is*

is exalted; but the rich, in that he is made low: because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away.

RELIGION certainly appears in some respects adverse to the happiness of men, inasmuch as it inculcates the daily practice of humiliation and contrition, mortification and self-denial. The injunction to cut off a right hand and pluck out a right eye, cannot, it might be thought, conduce to our comfort in this world, whatever it might do with respect to the world to come. But, if Christianity deprive us of some carnal joys, (I should rather say, limit and refine them,) it affords abundant ground for joy of a more exalted kind. It does not merely concede as a privilege, but prescribes as a duty, that we should "rejoice evermore." To persons of every description is this direction addressed in the words before us; and the reasons upon which it is founded are declared. In conformity with the Apostle's views, we shall shew,

I. The effects of religion upon the different orders of society—

We shall notice them,

1. Upon the poor—

[These are represented as "exalted" by Christianity. Not that they are raised out of their proper sphere, or have any right to assume consequence to themselves on account of their acquaintance with religion[a]: but they are exalted in their *state and condition*, their *dispositions and habits*, their *hopes and prospects*.

The poor are for the most part regarded in so low and mean a light, that a rich man would be ashamed to acknowledge them as related to him: yea, they themselves feel a very humiliating disparity between themselves and their opulent neighbours. But, when once they embrace the Gospel, and are made "rich in faith," "God himself is not ashamed to be called their God:" he calls them "his friends," "his sons," "his peculiar treasure:" "he gives them a name better than of sons and of daughters." They instantly become "kings and priests unto God;" and the very angels in heaven account it an honour to wait upon them, as their ministering servants. In

[a] Ignorant persons are sometimes faulty in this respect; but St. Paul strongly cautions all, and especially servants, upon this head. 1 Tim. vi. 1, 2.

In short, being born from above, they are sons of God, and "if sons, then heirs, heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ." What an elevation is this! Surely, in comparison of it, all earthly dignities are no better than the bawbles of children, or the conceits of maniacs.

When elevated thus, the poor begin to feel also dispositions suited to their state. While they are destitute of religion, they either riot in a licentious independence, without any regard to character, or, with a servility unrestrained by conscience, yield themselves willing instruments to any one that can reward their services. But when once they are taught of God, they learn primarily and solely to regard *his* will. We again say, that they will obey all the *lawful* commands of their superiors[b]; *they will regard their authority as God's*, and do whatever is required of them, "*as unto the Lord:*" but their first inquiry will be, "What does my God require?" and, if urged to violate their duty to him, they will reply as the Apostles did, "Whether it be right to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye:" "we ought to obey God rather than men[bb]." Nor have they a lower standard of action than the most polished Christian upon earth: if they are truly upright before God, the rule by which they walk is that prescribed by the Apostle[c]; and what can the highest refinement suggest more? Here therefore their elevation again appears, inasmuch as their habits are no longer formed by interest or the caprice of men, but founded on, and assimilated to, the mind and will of God.

As to the hopes of the poor, they have little to stimulate their ambition. To provide for their present wants, and to lay up something for a time of sickness, is the utmost that the generality of them aspire to. But what glorious views does religion open to them! Truly, instead of looking up with admiration to the great and opulent, they rather stand on an eminence, from whence they can look down upon them with pity and compassion. What are the prospects of princes, to those which are unfolded to *their* view? They can look within the veil of heaven itself, and there see crowns and kingdoms reserved for them, yea a seat upon the throne even of God himself. Who that contemplates this will not say that religion "exalts" the poor?].

2. Upon the rich—

[*These* religion humbles. It does not indeed despoil them of that honour which is due to their rank; (it rather confirms it to them[d];) but it humbles them *in their own estimation*, and *in the estimation of others*, and *in the daily habit of their minds*.

The rich are apt to arrogate much to themselves on account of

[b] Rom. xiii. 1, 2, 4. [bb] Acts v. 29. [c] 1 Cor. vii. 21—23.
[d] Rom. xiii. 7.

of their distinctions; and even before God to entertain high thoughts of themselves: "Our lips are our own: who is lord over *us*?" But let grace reach their hearts, and they no longer say, "I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing;" but, "I am wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." And so far are they from despising the poor on account of the inferiority of their station, that they most gladly "condescend to men of low estate," and love them truly as brethren, notwithstanding they are "brethren only of low degree."

It is scarcely needful to say how much they are lowered also in the eyes of others. Only let them become true disciples of Christ, and it will soon appear that they have lost the esteem of an ungodly world. However wise or amiable they may be, the serpent's seed will hiss at them. Though David was a king, and as eminent for piety as man could be, he was the sport of fools, and "drunkards made songs upon him." If any qualities could have insured universal respect, the Lord Jesus Christ would have obtained it. But "he was despised and rejected of men:" and "if they called the Master of the house Beelzebub, much more will they those of his household."

But though the contempt of men was once the most formidable of all evils, they are not much concerned at it now; for they are made "poor in spirit," and consequently regardless of the indignities that are offered to them. They know what they deserve at God's hands; and therefore they are willing to bear any thing from those whom *He* may use as instruments of his indignation or love. They are willing also that God should deal with them in any way he may see fit; and whether he give or take away, they are ready to bless his holy name. They are brought to a state of mind resembling that of a man subsisting upon alms: "they come to their God and Saviour for gold, that they may be enriched; for eye-salve, that they may see; and for raiment, that the shame of their nakedness may not appear." They are contented, yea they are glad, to seek their daily bread at his hands, and to live altogether as pensioners on his grace and mercy. In short, as in their own estimation they are *vile and guilty*, so in the habit of their minds they are *meek, patient, submissive, and dependent.*

Thus, while the poor are elevated by religion, the rich "are reduced and made low."]

And what shall we say of these diversified effects? Are they represented as adverse to our happiness? No: we are rather led to contemplate,

II. The universal satisfaction which they are calculated to produce—

That

That the poor have cause to rejoice in their exaltation, is obvious enough—

[Think only what the poorest of the Lord's people are privileged to enjoy—

First, *they have the most exalted of all characters.*—Though some few of the Lord's people have been opulent, the generality have been "a poor and afflicted people." The Apostles had little else besides a scrip and a staff: they were "poor, though making many rich; and had nothing, though in some respect they possessed all things." When it pleased God also to send his only dear Son into the world, what was the state to which he appointed *him?* It was that of a poor man, who "had not where to lay his head." And has not this dignified the condition of the poor? Yea, have they not reason to glory, in being so assimilated to their Lord and Saviour? The tribe of Levi had no portion allotted to them in Israel: but were they therefore less honourable than the rest? No: the Lord was their portion: and their want of earthly possessions was a favour conferred, and not a privilege denied. Thus it is an honour to the poor that they have their *all* in God: and though flesh and blood cannot receive the saying, it is really a greater honour to be fed like Elijah from day to day by the special providence of God, than to be living upon stores collected by the hands of men.

Next, *they are in the most favourable of all states.*—Our adorable Saviour has determined this point beyond a doubt. He has declared, that "it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven:" "with men," he says, "it is altogether *impossible.*" The Rich Youth perished only because he could not sacrifice his earthly possessions: had he been a poor man, he would in all probability have followed Christ, and have been at this moment in heaven. Besides, a rich man is afraid of being thought singular, if he "follow the Lord fully:" he fancies that his situation obliges him to conform to the customs of the world: he is ashamed to associate with the Lord's people: nor will he suffer any one to deal faithfully with him: but a poor man may follow his own ways, and seek instruction wherever he can obtain it; and nobody will trouble himself about him: his instructor also may, without compliment or circumlocution, come at once to the point, and "declare unto him all the counsel of God." What an advantage is this for the obtaining of everlasting happiness; and what a solid ground of joy to all who possess it.

Once more; *They have a sovereign antidote against all their disadvantages.*—Be it granted; they want the benefit of human learning: but they have the teachings of God's Spirit. They want

want many earthly comforts; but they have the promises of the living God. "Their afflictions may abound; but their consolations also abound by Christ." Whereinsoever they may be supposed to labour under any disadvantage, they have every thing that they need, treasured up for them in Christ Jesus; and out of his fulness they receive, in the time and measure which he knows to be best for them. Poor they may be in this world's goods; but they are enriched with "the unsearchable riches of Christ."

Now let the poor say whether they have not reason to rejoice. Surely if they estimate their state aright, they may well "rejoice with joy unspeakable and glorified[e]."]

That the rich have equal reason to rejoice in their humiliation, is, though less obvious, not at all less true—

[What a mercy is it to them, that *they are brought to see the vanity of all their earthly distinctions.* In their unenlightened state, they have no conception how contemptible those things are, which they suppose to be of such mighty consequence. What is an high-sounding title, or a large estate, to a man that in a few hours is about to launch into eternity? Yet that is the real condition of all: we are like the grass, which by the influence of the sun and rain is brought forth rapidly into gay luxuriance, but by an eastern blast is withered in an hour. Every thing we possess is perishing; and we ourselves also are fading away in the midst of our enjoyments[f]. Ungodly men do not like to reflect on these things; but the true Christian delights to realize them in his soul: and he well deserves our warmest congratulations, who has learned to estimate earthly things by the standard of truth.

It is also a mercy to the opulent servants of God, that *they are made to know wherein true honour and happiness consist.* That which may be possessed by the vilest, as well as by the best of men, can never constitute the chief good of man. But to be restored to the favour of God, to live in the enjoyment of his presence, to possess his image on our souls, to glorify him in the world, and to be growing up into a meetness for his everlasting inheritance, *this* is honour, *this* is happiness: and oh! what a mercy is it to see and feel this! Happy art thou, whoever thou art, that hast lost thy relish for earthly vanities, and art brought to set thine affections upon things above!

Finally, it is a mercy past all conception to *have for their portion an inheritance that shall never fade.* Were they instantly,

[e] See Hab. iii. 17, 18.

[f] This is particularly noticed in the text, and amplified in the verse that follows it.

instantly, and of necessity, to be deprived of all they possess, we should still bid them to "rejoice that they were made low:" for earthly riches, however great, are only dung and dross in comparison of the Christian's portion. Let those who in this life "took joyfully the spoiling of their goods," say, Whether they found any reason to alter their minds, when once they reached the mansions of bliss? How small do their sacrifices now appear, how unworthy of a single thought! Blessed then indeed are ye who are enabled to "forsake all and follow Christ:" even "in this world" he promises you "an hundredfold;" but what ye shall possess in the world to come, "no eye hath seen, or ear heard, or heart conceived."]

ADDRESS—

[But what shall we say, either to the poor or rich, who are destitute of an interest in Christ? Shall we bid them rejoice? What cause of joy have the poor, who, after all their trials and privations here, shall have no part or lot with the saints above? or what ground of glorying have the rich, who will so soon be "lifting up their eyes in torments, seeking in vain a drop of water to cool their tongues?" Should we attempt to console any from a consideration of their present attainments or possessions, the Prophet would rebuke our folly, and dash the cup out of their hands[g]. Be it known then to you all, that the poor must be exalted here, if ever they would be exalted in a better world; and the rich must be humbled here, if ever they would attain the true riches. The poor must be made partakers of a Divine nature, before they can "inherit a throne of glory;" and the rich must be emptied of *self*, before they can be "filled with all the fulness of God."]

[g] Jer. ix. 23, 24.

MCXL.

THE TESTIMONY OF GOD RESPECTING HIS TEMPTED PEOPLE.

Jam. i. 12. *Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for, when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.*

UNDER the afflictions with which we are visited in this vale of tears, philosophy has suggested many grounds for resignation and submission: but to find in them matter for self-congratulation and joy, was beyond the reach of unassisted reason. To that however are we led by the voice of Revelation, which teaches

teaches us to look with confidence to a future state, wherein all that we endure for God, and in meek submission to his will, shall be compensated with a weight of glory, proportioned to the trials we have here sustained for his sake, and the spiritual improvement which we have derived from them. St. James, who wrote to "his Jewish brethren who were scattered abroad" through the violence of persecution, frequently repeats this consolatory idea. He begins with bidding them to "count it all joy when they fall into divers temptations." Towards the close of his epistle he declares this to be at least the persuasion of his own mind; "Behold, we count them happy that endure[a]." But in the text he does not hesitate to affirm it as an unquestionable truth, that such persons are truly blessed: "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for, when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him." Now as he spake this by inspiration from God, I shall consider it as a declaration from God himself; and shall unfold to you,

I. God's testimony respecting his tempted people—

"Blessed is the man that endureth temptation"—

This sentiment doubtless, at first sight, appears very paradoxical—

[How can it be? Consider the state of God's tempted people. Consider only the lighter trials which they are called to bear for their Lord's sake: hatred, reproach, contempt, ridicule, the opposition of their nearest friends and relatives; this, every one that will follow the Lord Jesus Christ must endure: a variety of circumstances may tend to screen a man from heavier trials; but these, in some measure at least, are the lot of all, even of the least and poorest of Christ's followers, as well as of the most conspicuous among them: let the light but shine even into the poorest cottage, and the surrounding darkness will evince its incapacity to maintain communion with it. But come to the severer trials which thousands have to sustain: think of privations, the most distressing that can be imagined to flesh and blood: think of bonds, and imprisonment: think of death in its most terrible and appalling forms:

[a] Ch. v. 11.

forms: shall it be said that there is any blessedness in these? Must we not rather say, that the persons who are called to endure such things are in the most wretched state? Yes, I must confess, as St. Paul himself says, "If in this life only such persons have hope, they are of all men most miserable," and altogether in a most pitiable condition. Nevertheless, whilst we heartily subscribe to this position of the Apostle, we must still say of the declaration in our text, that,]

Yet it is most true—

[These sufferings must be viewed in their reference to eternity; and then they will wear a very different aspect from what they do when considered merely in themselves. For, "to those who love him and suffer for him, God has promised a crown of life, which they shall receive" at his hands the very instant that their sufferings are finished. Consider, "a crown!" the highest of all distinctions! "a crown of life!" not a corruptible one, like those which were given to the victors in the Olympic games; nor a temporary one, which is soon to be transferred to a successor;—a crown of life and glory, which fadeth not away! Conceive of the saint as just entering into the eternal world, and ascending to heaven from the flames of martyrdom: what a cloud of witnesses come forth to congratulate him on his victory, and to welcome him to those blest abodes! Behold him welcomed too by his Lord and Master, for whose name he has suffered, and under whose banners he has fought: hear the plaudit with which he is received, "Well done, good and faithful servant; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." See the crown brought forth, and put upon his head; and behold him seated on the very throne of God himself, according to that promise, "To him that overcometh, will I give to sit down with me upon my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father upon his throne:" I say, behold these things, and then tell me, Whether the prospect of such glory, assured to him by the promise and oath of God, did not constitute him blessed in the midst of all his sufferings? Of myriads respecting whom it is said, "These all came out of great tribulation," do you suppose there is one who regrets the sufferings he once endured for the sake of Christ? Not one assuredly: not one, who does not congratulate himself that he was ever counted worthy to suffer for the Redeemer's sake. But is St. James peculiar in his sentiments on this head? No: our blessed Lord bids all "who suffer for righteousness' sake to rejoice and leap for joy[b]:" and to the same effect speak all his holy Apostles[c]. Though therefore "no suffering is for the present joyous, but grievous," yet, taken in connexion with their present consolations, and with all the future consequences, they

[b] Matt. v. 10—12. [c] Rom. v. 3. 1 Pet. iv. 12—14.

they may justly be regarded as grounds of self-congratulation and joy[d].]

Such then being God's testimony, I proceed to set before you,

II. Some instructions arising out of it—

There are in our text several instructive hints, which ought not to be overlooked—

1. We should so love the Lord Jesus Christ, as to be willing to suffer for him—

[Love, even amongst men, is of little value, if it will make no sacrifices for the object beloved. But the Lord Jesus Christ is worthy of all the love that can ever be exercised towards him. Consider only what love he has manifested towards us: how he left the bosom of his Father for us, and emptied himself of all his glory, in order to assume our nature, and to expiate by his own blood the sins of the whole world: Is it a mere cold esteem that is a proper return for such love? When the terms on which alone he could save the world were proposed to him, he said, "Lo! I come, I delight to do thy will, O God." When he then proposes that we, in testimony of our love to him, should "take up our cross and follow him," shall we draw back, and complain that his yoke is too heavy for us? Of what value will he account such love as that? Go, he will say, and "offer it to your earthly friend," and see whether he will value it[e]: how much less then is it suited to express your obligations to me, who have redeemed you to God with my own blood!

It is worthy of observation, that the same person who in the first clause of the text is spoken of as "enduring temptation," in the last clause is characterized as "loving God:" for, in fact, none will suffer for him who do not love him; nor can any love him without being willing to suffer for him. If therefore we profess love to God and to the Lord Jesus Christ whilst yet we are afraid of bearing the contempt and hatred of an ungodly world for his sake, we only deceive our own souls: for he has plainly told us, that he will consider none as his disciples, who will not take up their cross daily and follow him. He has told us, that, if we are ashamed of him and deny him, he will be ashamed of us and deny us: and that those only who are willing to lay down their lives for his sake, shall ever save them unto life eternal.

I pray you, Brethren, try your love to the Saviour by this touchstone: and never imagine that it is sincere, unless it will stand this test———]

2. We

[d] Phil. ii. 17, 18. [e] Mal. i. 8.

2. We should so apprehend God's promises, as utterly to despise men's threats—

[" Exceeding great and precious are the promises which God has given unto them that love him:" nor is it possible for us to be in any situation, wherein he has not made ample provision for our support and consolation. Now these promises are all sure and certain: "they are all yea and amen in Christ Jesus:" nor can so much as one jot or tittle of them ever fail. But look at the threatenings of man; how empty and vain are they! The whole universe combined cannot effect the smallest thing without God's special permission: and, if permitted to execute their purposes, how impotent is their rage, when God is pleased to interpose in behalf of his people! Fire could not hurt the Hebrew Youths, nor lions injure the the defenceless Daniel, nor chains and dungeons confine Peter on the eve of his intended execution. Men, the most potent monarchs not excepted, are no more than an axe or saw in the hand of God, who uses it, or not, according to his own sovereign will, and for the promotion only of his own glory. "Who then art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and of a son of man that shall be as grass; and forgettest the Lord thy Maker?" Besides, suppose man to prevail to the extent of his wishes; what can he do? He can only reach the body: the soul he cannot touch. "Fear not man therefore, who can only kill the body, and after that hath no more that he can do; but fear Him who can destroy both body and soul in hell: yea, I say unto you, fear him." And, as God has promised that "our strength shall be proportioned to our day" of trial, let us rest on his word, and hold in utter contempt all the menaces of our most potent enemies[f].]

3. We should so realize eternity as to rise superior to all the concerns of time and sense—

[In the view of eternity, all that relates to time vanishes, as the twinkling star before the mid-day sun. If we could suppose a man caught up, like the apostle Paul, to the third heavens, and then sent down again to abide a few more years upon earth, what would be his estimate of those things which so occupy and enslave our carnal minds? The bawbles of children would not be more contemptible in his eyes than the glittering pageantry of courts: and, though the sufferings which are sometimes inflicted on the saints are heavy, they would be reckoned by him as "not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall ere long be revealed in us." But it is not needful that we be transported to heaven to this end: we have the whole set before us in the Oracles of God: and, if we believe

[f] See Isai. xxxvii. 22.

believe those Oracles, we may be as fully convinced of the comparative insignificance of earthly things, as if we saw the crown of glory with our bodily eyes, or already tasted of the heavenly bliss. Let us then seek that "faith, which is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen." Then shall we, like those of old, "take joyfully the spoiling of our goods, knowing that we have in heaven a better and an enduring substance;" and, with Moses, shall "esteem even the the reproach of Christ as greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt."]

MCXLI.

SIN THE OFFSPRING OF OUR OWN HEARTS.

Jam. i. 13—15. *Let no man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: but every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.*

THERE are temptations necessarily connected with the Christian life, and which often, through the weakness of our nature, become the *occasions* of sin: and there are other temptations which are the direct and immediate *cause* of sin. The former are external; the latter are within a man's own bosom. The former may be referred to God as their author, and be considered as a ground of joy: the latter must be traced to our own wicked hearts; and are proper grounds of the deepest humiliation. This distinction is made in the passage before us. In the foregoing verses the former are spoken of[a]; in the text, the latter.

In the words of our text, we notice the *origin*, the *growth*, and the *issue* of sin. We notice,

I. Its origin—

Many are ready to trace their sin to God himself—

[This is done when we say, "I could not help it:" for then we reflect on our Maker, as not enduing us with strength sufficient for our necessities. It is done also, though not quite so directly, when we ascribe our fall to those who were in some respect accessary to it: for then we blame the providence of God, as before we did his creative power. It was thus

[a] ver. 2, 12.

thus that Adam acted, when he imputed his transgression to the influence of his wife, and ultimately to God who gave her to him[b].]

But God neither is, nor can be, the Author of sin—

He may, and does, try men, in order to exercise their graces, and to shew what he has done for their souls. Thus he tempted Abraham, and Job, and Joseph, and many others. But these very instances prove that he did not necessitate, or in any respect influence, them to sin; for they shone the brighter in proportion as they were tried. But he never did, nor ever will, lead any man into sin. And though he is said to have "hardened Pharaoh's heart," and to have "moved David to number the people," he did not either of these things in any other way than by leaving them to themselves[c].]

All sin must be traced to the evil propensities of our own nature—

["A clean thing cannot be brought out of an unclean;" and therefore no descendant of Adam can be free from sin. We have within us a secret bias to sin; which, however good our direction appear to be, operates at last to turn us from God. That bias is called "lust," or desire, or concupiscence: and it works in all, though in a great variety of degrees and manner. All sin is fruit proceeding from this root, even from "the lust that wars in our members;" and in whatever channel our iniquity may run, it must be traced to that as its genuine and proper source.]

This will appear more strongly, while we mark,

II. Its growth—

Its first formation in the soul is often slow and gradual—

["Lust," or our inward propensity to sin, presents something to our imagination as likely to gratify us in a high degree. Whether it be profit, or pleasure, or honour, we survey it with a longing eye, and thereby our desire after it is inflamed. Conscience perhaps suggests that it is forbidden fruit which we are coveting; and that, as being prohibited, it will ultimately tend rather to produce misery than happiness. In opposition to this, our sinful principle intimates a doubt whether the gratification be forbidden; or at least whether, in our circumstances, the tasting of it be not very allowable: at all events, it suggests that our fellow-creatures will know nothing respecting it; that we may easily repent of the evil; and that God is very ready to forgive; and that many who have used

[b] Gen. iii. 12.

[c] Exod. iv. 21. & 2 Sam. xxiv. 1. with 2 Chron. xxxii. 31.

used far greater liberties are yet happy in heaven; and that consequently we may enjoy the object of our desire, without suffering any loss or inconvenience. In this manner the affections are kindled, and the will is bribed to give its consent[d]: then the bait is swallowed, the hook is fastened within us; and we are "dragged away[e]" from God, from duty, from happiness; yea, if God do not seasonably interpose, we are drawn to everlasting perdition.]

Its progress to maturity is generally rapid—

[The metaphor of a fœtus formed in the womb, and brought afterwards to the birth, is frequently used in Scripture in reference to sin[f]. When the will has consented to comply with the suggestions of the evil principle, then the embryo of sin is, if we may so speak, formed within us; and nothing remains but for time and opportunity to bring it forth. This of course must vary with the circumstances under which we are: our wishes may be accomplished, or may prove abortive: but whether our desire be fulfilled or not, sin is imputed to us, because it formally exists within us: or rather it is brought to the birth, though not altogether in the way we hoped and expected.]

We proceed to notice,

III. Its issue—

Sin was never barren: its issue is numerous as the sands upon the sea-shore: but in every instance the name of its first-born has been "death." Death is,

1. Its penalty—

[Death temporal, spiritual, and eternal, was threatened as the punishment of transgression while our first parents were yet in paradise. And on many occasions has the threatening been renewed[g]——— So that sin and death are absolutely inseparable.]

2. Its desert—

[The fixing of death as the consequence of transgression was no arbitrary appointment. The penal evil of death is no more than the moral evil of sin. Consider the extreme malignity of sin: What rebellion against God! What a dethroning of God from our hearts! What a preferring of Satan himself, and his service, to God's light and easy yoke! View it as it is seen in the agonies and death of God's only Son: Can that be

[d] Isai. xliv. 20. See this whole process illustrated, Gen. iii. 1—6.

[e] These seem to be the precise ideas intended to be conveyed by δελεαζόμενος καὶ ἐξελκόμενος.

[f] Job. xv. 35. Ps. vii. 14. with the text.

[g] Ezek. xviii. 4. Rom. i. 18. & vi. 21, 23. Gal. iii. 10.

be of small malignity which so oppressed and overwhelmed "Jehovah's fellow?" Of those who are now suffering the torments of the damned, not one would dare to arraign the justice of God, or to say that his punishment exceeded his offence: whatever we in our present state may think, our mouths will all be shut, when we have juster views, and an experimental sense, of the biterness of sin[h].]

3. Its tendency—

[We may see the proper effect of sin in the conduct of Adam, when he fled from God, whom he had been accustomed to meet with familiarity and joy[i]. He felt a consciousness that his soul was bereft of innocence; and he was unable to endure the sight of Him whom he had so greatly offended. In the same manner sin affects our minds: it indisposes us for communion with God; it unfits us for holy exercises: and, if a person under the guilt and dominion of it were admitted into heaven, he would be unable to participate the blessedness of those around him; and would rather hide himself under rocks and mountains, than dwell in the immediate presence of an holy God. Annihilation would be to him the greatest favour that could be bestowed upon him; so truly does the Apostle say, that "the motions of sin do work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death[k]."]

ADVICE—

1. Do not palliate sin—

[Though circumstances doubtless may either lessen or increase the guilt of sin, nothing under heaven can render it light or venial. Our temptations may be great; but nothing can hurt us, if we do not ourselves concur with the tempter. That wicked fiend exercised all his malice against our adorable Lord; but could not prevail, because there was nothing in him to second or assist his efforts. So neither could he overcome us, if we did not voluntarily submit to his influence. All sin therefore must be traced to the evil dispositions of our own hearts; and consequently affords us a just occasion to humble ourselves before God in dust and ashes. If we presume to reflect on God as the author of our sin, we increase our guilt an hundred-fold: it is only in abasing ourselves that we can at all hope for mercy and forgivenesss.]

2. Do not trifle with temptation—

[We carry about with us much inflammable matter, if we may so speak; and temptation strikes the spark which produces an explosion. How readily are evil thoughts suggested by what we see or hear; and how strongly do they fix upon the

[h] Matt. xxii. 12. [i] Gen. iii. 8. [k] Rom. vii. 5.

the mind. "Behold how great a matter a little fire kindleth!" Let us then stand at a distance from the places, the books, the company that may engender sin. And let us, in conformity with our Lord's advice, "watch and pray, that we enter not into temptation."]

3. Do not for one moment neglect the Saviour—

[There is none but Jesus that can stand between sin and death. Indeed even "he overcame death only by dying" in our stead: and we can escape it only by believing in him. We deserve death: we have deserved it for every sin we have ever committed. Ten thousand deaths are our proper portion. Let us then look to Him who died for us. Let us look to him, not only for the sins committed long ago, but for those of daily incursion. Our best act would condemn us, if he did not "bear the iniquity of our holy things." He is our only deliverer from the wrath to come: to Him therefore let us flee continually, and "cleave unto him with full purpose of heart."]

MCXLII.

REGENERATION—ITS AUTHOR, MEANS, AND END.

Jam. i. 18. *Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first-fruits of his creatures.*

THERE is an evil in the world so monstrous and so horrible, that one can scarcely conceive how it should ever be committed; namely, the ascribing unto God our own iniquities, and tracing them to him as their proper author. Yet is this the common refuge of sinners; who, when led captive by their own lusts, excuse themselves by averring, that no criminality can attach to the indulgence of passions which God himself has given them. But St. James protests against this impiety, and declares, that "God tempteth no man; but that every man who yields to temptation, is drawn away and enticed by his own lust[a]." Another evil also he sets himself to counteract, namely, the tracing of good to ourselves, as though it originated with us as its proper authors. This, though it does not shock our feelings so much as the former does, yet is of the same nature with it, and

[a] ver. 13, 14.

and no less offensive in the sight of God: for, whilst the former sentiment makes God the cause of evil, the latter denies him to be the cause of good. But on this subject also St. James rectifies our views; assuring us, that, as all light proceeds from the sun, so does "every good and perfect gift come down from above, even from God, the Father of lights." We may indeed have great changes, as from day to night, or from summer to winter: but these arise from ourselves only; for "with him is no variableness, neither shadow of turning;" and, if we have less abundant communications from him at one time than another, it is owing to the change of our position with respect to him, and to our temporary departure from him. If, on the contrary, a spiritual change has taken place in any of us, so that we have been born again, it is because "he begat us with the word of truth;" and begat us, not on account of any merit in us, but purely "of his own will," and "to the praise of the glory of his own grace."

In this assertion of the Apostle the whole subject of Regeneration or conversion comes before us: and we shall be led to mark,

I. The source from whence it flows—

It is not from man—

[Man has neither power nor inclination to convert himself truly and thoroughly to God. If only we consider what is said in the Scriptures respecting the extreme weakness of man in relation to every thing that is spiritually good,—that "without Christ he can *do* nothing;" that "no man can *say* that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost;" and that "we are not of ourselves sufficient even to *think* any thing that is good;" that our sufficiency even for that is of God alone,—how can it be thought that we should be able to "put off the old man and to put on the new," and to "renew ourselves in the spirit of our minds after the image of our God in righteousness and true holiness?" The very terms in which this change is spoken of, as a resurrection, a new birth, a new creation, clearly import that it is beyond the power of man to effect it in himself. We need go no further than to the image used in the text itself, to shew the utter absurdity of any such idea. Nor have any others a power to effect it in us: for man can only address himself to our outward senses: he has no access whatever to our hearts; he

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can therefore never accomplish in us so great a work, as that of "giving us a new heart, and renewing a right spirit within us."

Nor has any man the inclination thus to renew himself. Let us look around, and see what is the state of mankind at large. Are they mourning over their degeneracy and corruption? Are they panting after holiness? Are they using the means which are confessedly within their reach? Are they thankful for every aid they can receive, and for every instruction by which their good desires may be furthered? If you think they are, take your Bible with you, and go to all your neighbours and proffer your assistance to them, and solicit a reciprocal aid from them: act as if you all were shipwrecked, and all were anxious for their own personal welfare, and for the welfare of those around them. Do this, and you will soon see how much inclination men have for a thorough conversion of their souls to God.]

It is from God, and from God alone—

[This we are not left to determine by any fallible reasonings of our own: it is decided for us by God himself; who, speaking of all who received the Lord Jesus Christ, and thereby received power to become the sons of God, says, "They were born, not of blood (or in consequence of their descent from any particular parents), nor of the will of the flesh (that is, from any good desires of their own), nor of the will of man (that is, from the kind efforts of others), but of God[b]." It is God alone who makes one to differ from another[c]: it is "God alone who gives us either to will, or to do[d]," what is good: and "He who is the Author, is also the Finisher[e]," of all that can issue in a man's salvation.]

But as God is pleased to use means and instruments in this work, I will proceed to shew,

II. The means by which it is effected—

It becomes not us to restrict God in the use of means.

[b] John i. 12, 13. [c] 1 Cor. iv. 7. [d] Phil. ii. 13.

[e] Heb. xii. 2. How all this accords with the doctrines of the Church of England, may be seen by referring to our Articles and Liturgy.

In our Liturgy we thus address the Deity: "O God, from whom all holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works do proceed." And the tenth Article runs thus: "The condition of man after the fall of Adam is such, that he cannot turn and prepare himself by his own natural strength and good works, to faith and calling upon God. Wherefore we have no power to do good works, pleasant and acceptable to God, without the grace of God by Christ preventing us, that we may have a good will, and working with us when we have that good will."

means. We know that he frequently makes use of affliction, and of conversation; and we will not presume to say that he never employs even dreams or visions for the attainment of his ends: we know assuredly that he has done so in former times; and therefore he *may* do so at this time;—(we confess, however, that we are not partial to any thing arising out of *such* means: we are always fearful that they will issue in something transient and delusive: we prefer infinitely what proceeds from causes more rational, and more tangible, and more consonant with the dispensation under which we live;)—but we are not at liberty to *limit* God to any particular mode of communicating his blessings to mankind. Of one thing however we are sure; (and that will effectually cut off all occasion for enthusiastic delusions;) namely, that whatever means God makes use of to bring the soul to a consideration of its state, it is "by the word of truth" alone that he savingly converts it to himself. *By other means he may call our attention to the word;* but by the word only does he guide us to the knowledge of his truth, and to the attainment of his salvation.

By the word he begins the good work within us—

[It is from thence alone that we attain the knowledge of our fallen state ———From thence alone can we learn the way of salvation through a crucified Redeemer ———From thence alone can we derive encouragement to lay hold on the hope that is set before us: for the only legitimate object of faith is the word of God; and "without faith, so grounded, we cannot possibly please God[f]."]

By the word also he carries it on, and perfects it, within us— .

["The word is that unadulterated milk by which the new-born babes must grow[g]." And, whatever degrees of sanctification are produced in us at a more advanced period, they are effected by the same divine instrument; as St. Paul has said: "Christ loved the Church, and gave himself for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water *by the word*, that he might present it to himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that it should be holy, and without blemish[h]." Hence our blessed Lord, when praying for his Church, said, "Sanctify them through

[f] Heb. xi. 6. [g] 1 Pet. ii. 2. [h] Eph. v. 26, 27.

through thy truth: thy word is truth[l]." Not that the word has this power in itself: for thousands both hear and read it without deriving any benefit from it to their souls. It is "the sword of the Spirit[k];" and effects no more than what He who wields it sees fit to accomplish. If it "come in word only," it is of no weight at all: but when it "comes in demonstration of the Spirit and of power[l]," then it effects all for which God himself has sent it[m]:" and "*through him* is mighty to the pulling down of all the strong-holds[n]" of sin and Satan.]

Thus is the whole work of grace wrought within us: and a blessed work it will appear, whilst we shew,

III. The end for which it is wrought—

The contemplation of this may well reconcile us to all that has been said about the sovereign will of God. The ground on which men are so jealous of the Divine sovereignty is, that they think it leads to a disregard of holiness; since, if God have chosen men to salvation, they shall attain it without holiness; and if he have not chosen them to salvation, they can never be saved, how holy soever they may be. But this is altogether an erroneous statement. God is not so regardless of holiness as this supposes: on the contrary, if he elect any, it is "that they may be holy, and without blame before him in love[o];" and, if "he beget any with the word of truth," it is "that we may be to him a kind of first-fruits of his creatures"—

[The "first-fruits" were, by God's own appointment, holy; so that every one was bound to consecrate them unto him[p]. In like manner are God's people to be holy, and altogether devoted to his service. They are on no account to imagine themselves at their own disposal: "They are God's; and must glorify him with their body and their spirit, which are his[q]."

It is not to salvation *only* that God ordains his people; but to sanctification, as the way to, and the preparation for, the blessedness of heaven[r]. "He has chosen them *out of the world*,"

[l] John xvii. 17. [k] Eph. vi. 17. [l] 1 Thes. i. 5. and ii. 13.
[m] Isai. lv. 10, 11. [n] 2 Cor. x. 4, 5. [o] Eph. i. 4.
[p] Deut. xviii. 4. [q] 1 Cor. vi. 19. 20. [r] 2 Thess. ii. 13.

world[s]," from which "they are to be separated[t]," as the first-fruits are from the remainder of the harvest. Being "a chosen generation, they are to be a peculiar people[u]," "zealous of good works[x]." To this "the word of truth" bears testimony in every part. To think that God should "beget" any person by his word and Spirit, and leave him at liberty to be a servant of sin and Satan, is a thought from which one revolts with utter abhorrence. Thus at least did St. Paul: "Is Christ the Minister of sin? God forbid[y]." "Shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid[z]." "Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid[a]." "God has not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness:" and, whatever men may say respecting God's "will" in ordaining us to life, or respecting our relation to him as his children, "begotten of him," this is a truth that must never, for one moment be questioned, "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord[b]."]

SEE then that you,

1. Value the ordinances of God—

[The word is doubtless to be read with care and diligence at home: for, as we have said, it is the food of God's new-born offspring, and the great medium by which he communicates his blessings to the soul. But it is through the Ministry of that word that God chiefly works. He will bless those who read it in their own houses: but he will bless also, and more abundantly, those who at the same time attend upon the ministration of it by those whom he has sent to speak in his name; for "he loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob." Let not any think light of the ordinances, because the persons who dispense them are weak as other men: for "God has put his treasure into earthen vessels, on purpose that the excellency of the power may the more manifestly appear to be of him." If indeed men look to the instrument, they will meet with nothing but disappointment: but if they will look through the instrument to God, they shall find the "word as quick and powerful[c]" as ever, and shall experience it to be "the power of God unto their everlasting salvation[d]." There is no blessing which God will not dispense to them by means of it — — — Nor, if only they mix faith with what they hear[e], shall their most enlarged expectations of "profit" ever be disappointed.]

2. Labour

[s] John xv. 19. [t] 2 Cor. vi. 17. [u] 2 Pet. ii. 9.
[x] Tit. ii. 14. [y] Gal. ii. 17. [z] Rom. vi. 14.
[a] Rom. vi. 1. [b] Heb. xii. 14. [c] Heb. iv. 12.
[d] Rom. i. 16. [e] Heb. iv. 2.

2. Labour to improve them for their destined end—

[Sanctification, as you have heard, is that for which both the word and ordinances are to be improved. Examine then yourselves by what you hear, that you may find out every defect in your obedience; and keep in remembrance both the precepts and examples that are set before you, that so you may attain to the highest degrees of holiness, and "stand perfect and complete in all the will of God[f]." You know, that to appropriate any of the first-fruits to a common use would have been sacrilege: beware then lest the world rob God of any measure of those services which are due to him alone. You are to be his wholly and altogether: "your bodies are to be his," and "your members instruments of righteousness unto him[g]." Your souls, with all their faculties, are to be his also; his temple, wherein he is to reside; his throne, whereon he is to reign: "your whole body, soul, and spirit are to be sanctified wholly unto him[h]:" you are to be altogether "a living sacrifice unto him:" and this is no other than "your reasonable service[i]." And, as it is by this only that you can make a due improvement of ordinances, so it is by this only that you can have in your own souls any evidence that you are born of God. As for others, they can form no judgment at all of you, but by your works. The rule for them to judge by, is this: "He that committeth sin is of the devil: whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin: for his seed, namely, the word of God, abideth in him; and he cannot sin: because he is born of God[k]." Press forward then for the highest attainments, that, "being blameless and harmless and without rebuke in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, ye may shine as lights in the world, and approve yourselves indeed to be the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty[l]."]

[f] Col. iv. 12. [g] Rom. vi. 13.
[h] 1 Thess. v. 23. [i] Rom. xii. 1.
[k] 1 John iii. 8, 9. "*The seed*" in this passage means *the word*: see 1 Pet. i. 23. & 1 John ii. 14. [l] Phil. ii. 15, 16.

MCXLIII.

SELF-DECEIT EXPOSED.

Jam. i. 26. *If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain.*

IF there be persons in the present day who pervert the doctrines of the Gospel, and take occasion from

from them to depreciate morality, we must not wonder at it, since this evil obtained to a very great extent even in the Apostolic age. It was with a view to persons of this description chiefly that St. James wrote this practical and vituperative epistle. It is evident that the Christian temper was too much overlooked by many who professed themselves followers of Christ. There were many who loved to hear the Gospel, but neglected to comply with its injunctions. In particular, they would give a very undue licence to their tongues, indulging themselves in most uncharitable censures of each other; whilst in the opinion of their own party, and in their own estimation, they stood high as "saints of the Lord." But, in the words which we have read, the apostle James declared plainly to them, that they "deceived their own souls," and that "their religion was vain."

In this declaration we may see,

I. The proper office of religion in the soul—

Religion is not intended to fill the mind with notions, but to regulate the heart and life—

1. *As admitted into the soul,* it brings us under the authority of God's law—

[Previous to our reception of the Gospel, we know no other rule of conduct than that of our own will, or the opinions of the world around us. But when we have "received the truth as it is in Jesus," we see, that God is a Sovereign who must be obeyed; and that his law is to be a rule of action to all his creatures. His law extends, not to outward actions only, but to the thoughts and desires of the heart; over which it exercises a complete controul. We now begin to see, that the requirements of that law, in their utmost extent, are all "holy, and just, and good;" precisely such as it became Jehovah to enact, and such as it is our truest happiness to obey. The mere circumstance that it has been spoken by the Lord, is quite sufficient to give it, in all cases, a paramount authority: nor are the customs or opinions of the whole world, however long or universally established, accounted of any weight in opposition to it — — —]

2. *As operating in the soul,* it disposes and qualifies us to obey that law—

[The Gospel duly received, does not merely convince the

the judgment, but engages the affections; and at the same time that it gives a new taste; it imparts a vital energy; whereby we are enabled to "put off the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and to put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." It is an engine of vast power: it is "mighty through God to the pulling down of the strong-holds of sin and Satan: it casts down all towering imaginations, and every thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God; and brings into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ[a]."

Now *all this is implied in the text.* It is taken for granted, that religion, duly operating, will enable us to "bridle the tongue." But, to regulate the tongue, we must of necessity "keep and rectify the heart," since "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh[b]." If therefore the not bridling of the tongue argues our religion to be vain, it is evident, that the proper office of religion is to bring the whole soul into subjection to God's law, and to render us conformed to the perfect example of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. It will make us to aspire after this, and to strive for it, and in a considerable measure to attain it. I say, *in a considerable measure;* because perfection, sinless perfection, is not to be attained by such corrupt and feeble creatures as we. "The wildest beasts have been so tamed as almost to have changed their nature: but the tongue can no man tame[c]," so as never in any instance to offend with it. Not even Moses, or Job, or Paul attained such perfection as that. But still, as to any predominant habit of sin, we shall be delivered from it, if we are truly upright before God; and shall be enabled to say with David, "I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue: I will keep my mouth with a bridle," when most tempted and provoked to speak unadvisedly with my lips[d].]

From hence we can be at no loss to determine,

II. The state of those in whom its appropriate influence is not found—

The declaration in our text may be accounted harsh; and particularly as made to persons who were considered as eminent in the Church of Christ. But it is true; and must be delivered, whether men will hear, or whether they will forbear. Mark,

1. What is here supposed—

[It is supposed that a man may seem to others to be religious,

[a] 2 Cor. x. 4, 5.
[b] Matt. xii. 34.
[c] Jam. iii. 7, 8.
[d] Ps. xxxix. 1.

gious, and may be fully persuaded in his own mind that he is so; and yet have so little government of his tongue, as to prove that he deceives his own heart, and that his religion is vain. And is this a supposition that is not warranted in fact? Would to God it were so! but he can know very little of the Christian world, divided as it is into innumerable sects and parties, and not know, that the most prominent in every sect have been but too ready to condemn each other, and oftentimes with an acrimony which has shewn clearly enough under whose malignant influence they were. A little difference of sentiment about certain doctrines (though not of primary or fundamental importance), or about matters of discipline only (which are confessedly less plainly revealed in the Gospel), have been sufficient, and still are, to rend the seamless garment of Christ into ten thousand pieces, and to fill with mutual enmity whole communities, who profess to have embraced a religion of love. Nor is it in this respect only that the Christian world are obnoxious to the reproof given in our text. The pride, and conceit and vanity of many professors proclaim to the whole world how destitute they are of true humility, and consequently of true religion. Their envious surmisings too, their uncharitable censures, their vindictive recriminations, alas! there are scarcely any persons more guilty of these things than blind bigots, and party zealots, and talkative professors. Shall I mention the licence which many give to their tongue, in ungoverned anger, in palpable falsehood, in shameless impurity? Ah! tell it not in Gath; publish it not in the streets of Askelon: such are the defects of many who yet stand fair with the Christian world, and would think themselves greatly injured, if their piety were held in doubt. It is plain that such things existed in the Apostle's days; and we flatter ourselves too much, if we think that the Church is a whit purer in the present day. There ever were, and there still are, "tares growing with the wheat;" and they must be left to God, who alone can make the separation.]

2. What is here asserted—

[The religion of such persons, however eminent they may be in the estimation of themselves or others, is altogether "vain:" for it will neither be accepted of God, nor be of any avail for the salvation of their souls. God cannot accept it, because he looketh at the heart. External forms, or strong professions, cannot deceive him. "He requireth truth in the inward parts:" and forms his estimate of men by the conformity of their hearts to his mind and will. To what purpose will it be that we "cry, Lord, Lord, if we do not the things which he says?" We are told by St. Paul to what

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an height of religion men may apparently attain, even "exercising a faith that can remove mountains, and speaking as with the tongues of angels, and giving all their goods to feed the poor, yea and their bodies also to be burnt, and yet be no better before God than sounding brass or tinkling cymbals[e]." Let those who have not the government of the tongue attend to this. The want of that self-command argues a radical want of the vital principle of love: and the want of that principle vitiates all that we can either do or suffer, and renders it of no value in the sight of God. He has warned us beforehand, that "he will take account even of every *idle* word that we speak[f]," and much more of every uncharitable word; and that "by our words we shall be justified, and by our words we shall be condemned[g]."]

In reflecting on this subject, we cannot but observe,

1. In what an awful state they must be, who have not even the appearance of religion—

[I know that persons who have no desire after vital godliness will bless themselves because they are not hypocrites. But is it to the credit of any, that they do not even pretend to have the fear of God in their hearts? Is it to the credit of any, that whilst they name the name of Christ, they do not so much as profess to depart from iniquity, or to take his yoke upon them? What is this boast, but an avowed acknowledgement that they are rebels against God, violators of his laws, haters of his Christ, and contemners of his salvation? Go ye on then, and glory that ye are not hypocrites;—though it were easy enough to prove that you are the basest hypocrites, because you profess yourselves Christians, and would be indignant with any one who should dispute your title to Christian ordinances and Christian burial, whilst you give the lie to that profession by the whole tenor of your life and conversation;—I say, go on, and glory that ye are not hypocrites. Then you shall not be condemned as hypocrites. But ye are rebels; and, as rebels, ye shall be condemned: and that Saviour whom you now despise, will shortly say, "Bring hither those mine enemies, who would not that I should reign over them, and slay them before me." Yes verily, if those who have so much religion as to stand high in the estimation of the Christian Church on account of it, may yet deceive themselves, and have their religion vain, much more must you deceive yourselves, if you hope to escape the judgments of God in the eternal world. If their *religion* will not save them, much less will your *irreligion* save you.

Repent

[e] 1 Cor. xiii. 1—3. [f] Matt. xii. 36. [g] ib. ver. 37.

Repent then, and turn unto your God in sincerity and truth. Yet look not to your reformation to save you, but to the Lord Jesus Christ, who expiated your guilt by his own blood, and offers you by my mouth the forgiveness of your sins. As an Ambassador from him, I beseech you in his stead, be ye reconciled to God. Then shall not only your "sins be blotted out as a cloud," but your very love of sin shall be subdued and mortified by his Spirit and grace; so that the fountain which has hitherto emitted so much that was impure, shall henceforth flow in endless streams of praise to your Redeeming God[h].]

2. What need the professors of religion have of vigilance and care—

[You see in others how difficult it is to have the full government of the tongue. Know then that the same difficulty exists in relation to yourselves. But in yourselves you are apt to overlook it. It is surprising how faulty a religious professor may be in the licence which he allows to his tongue, whilst he is not conscious of any fault at all, or perhaps takes credit to himself for his fidelity and zeal. But, when you hear how fatally you may deceive your own souls, it becomes you to be upon your guard, and to pray continually, with David, "Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth, and keep the door of my lips[i]." And be not content with abstaining from evil discourse, but let your words be always such as may "minister grace to the hearers, and tend to the use of edifying[k]." The power of speech is that which above all others may be employed for the honour of God, and the welfare of your fellow-creatures. In this respect your tongue is "your glory." Bid it then "awake to honour and adore your God[l]." Remember, it is not the talkative professor of religion that is always the most humble or most acceptable in the sight of God. Many of that description there are, who "think themselves to be something, when they are nothing; and thereby eventually deceive and ruin their own souls[m]———Be not ye of that unhappy number. Be rather "swift to hear, and slow to speak[n]." And, if you do stand forward to instruct and benefit others, be doubly careful to set an example of all that you inculcate, and to let the power of religion appear in the whole of your own spirit and deportment.]

[h] Jam. iii. 11. [i] Ps. cxli. 3. [k] Eph. iv. 29.
[l] Ps. lvii. 8. [m] Gal. vi. 3. See especially Rom. ii. 18—20.
[n] ver. 19.

MCXLIV.

PURE AND UNDEFILED RELIGION DESCRIBED.

Jam. i. 27. *Pure religion, and undefiled, before God and the Father, is this; To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.*

ERRORS of the most fatal kind were early found in the Christian Church. So speedily had vital godliness decayed, that even in the Apostles' days a mere form and profession of religion was deemed sufficient. Under the idea of exalting faith, the value of good works was depreciated, and the necessity of performing them denied. Against such errors the apostle James lifted up his voice like a trumpet: he bore testimony against them in the most energetic manner: he declared that "faith without works was dead[a]:" that to be "hearers of the word and not doers of it, was the way to deceive our own souls[b]:" that the "religion" which did not produce self-government, "was vain[c]:" and that that religion, which alone God would acknowledge as "pure and undefiled," would lead to the most self-denying exercises of love, and to a freedom from all those corruptions with which the world abounded: "Pure religion, &c. &c."

Let us consider,

I. His description of true religion—

We must remember that the Apostle is here speaking of religion *solely* in a *practical* view. He is not speaking of principles. Not that he disregards them: on the contrary, instead of setting aside the doctrines of justification by faith, as some would represent, he insists on the necessity of faith as strongly as St. Paul himself; only he distinguishes between that which is living and operative, and that which is uninfluential and dead; and affirms, that it is the living and operative faith only, which will save the soul.

Nor is *the whole* even of practical religion in the contemplation of the Apostle in this passage. He does

[a] Jam. ii. 20. [b] ver. 22. [c] ver. 26.

does not advert to the exercise of our *affections towards God*, but only to our *actions towards men*: and it is in this confined view that we must understand him as speaking in the words before us.

He informs us how religion will influence us in reference to,

1. The world at large—

[The terms here made use of draw the line with great accuracy. It is not required of us to renounce the world entirely: we are social Beings, and have many social duties to perform: and, if we were to abandon society altogether, we should withhold from mankind many benefits which they have a right to expect from us. When God calls us "the salt of the earth," it is necessarily implied that we are to come in contact with that mass, which, by our influence, is to be kept from corruption. But from "the corruptions that are in the world[d]" we are to "keep ourselves unspotted." Its pleasures, riches, and honours we are to despise[e], even as our Lord Jesus Christ himself did[f]. Nor are we to be conformed to its sentiments and habits[g]: even its friendship we are neither to court nor desire[h]. If we would approve ourselves Christians indeed, we must "feel such an influence from the cross of Christ, as to be crucified unto the world, and to have the world altogether crucified unto us[i]." Thus, though *in* the world, we shall clearly shew that we are not *of* the world.]

2. That part of it which is destitute and afflicted—

[Love is the life and soul of religion: and, as it will extend to all in general, so will it manifest itself particularly towards those who are bowed down with affliction. The "visiting" of the afflicted is an office which the true Christian will delight to execute; yet not in a slight and transient manner: he will so interest himself in all their concerns, as to relieve and comfort them to the utmost of his power[k]. His conduct towards them will resemble that of Job[l]. It is the way in which he expresses his obligations to God[m]; and in which he shews his love to his Lord and Saviour[n]. He considers love and charity as a commandment stamped with peculiar authority by Christ himself[o]; and, in obedience to it, he desires to "weep with them that weep, as well as to rejoice with them that rejoice[p]." This is "pure and undefiled religion." Other things

[d] 2 Pet. i. 4. [e] 1 John ii. 15, 16. [f] John xvii. 14—16.
[g] Rom. xii. 2. [h] Jam. iv. 4. [i] Gal. vi. 14.
[k] This is implied in the word ἐπισκέπτεσθαι.
[l] Job xxix. 12, 13, & xxx. 25, & xxxi. 16—20.
[m] Isai. lviii. 6, 7. [n] Matt. xxv. 45. [o] John xiii. 34.
[p] Rom. xii. 15.

things may pass for religion *before men*, but this is religion "*before God:*" it is that which he will acknowledge as agreeable to his will, and will recompense with tokens of his approbation.]

This description of religion will probably force from us a tribute of applause: but, instead of bestowing on it empty commendations, it will be proper to consider,

III. The use we are to make of it,

The Apostle doubtless designed that we should regard it,

1. As a criterion whereby to judge of our state—

["Victory over the world" is one of those marks which are universally found in the Lord's people, and in no other [q]. Other persons, it is true, may be free from open vices, and, through disappointments and infirmities, may become disgusted with the world: but their love of the world is not at all changed, provided they could have the things on which their hearts are fixed, with health and strength to enjoy them.

A delight in all the offices of love to men for Christ's sake is another mark, whereby Christians are distinguished from all other persons. It is a disposition which springs out of a sense of redeeming love [r], and infallibly "accompanies salvation [s]." The want of this disposition argues a total absence of Divine grace [t]; whilst the exercise of it warrants an assured confidence in the Divine favour [u].

Let us then bring ourselves to this touchstone. Let us ask ourselves, Whether we do indeed account it "better to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting?" Do we consider ourselves as "pilgrims and sojourners here;" and value our possessions, not so much for the respect or comfort which they procure to ourselves, as for the opportunities they afford us of honouring God and benefiting our fellow-creatures?

Alas! alas! when estimated according to this rule, how little of "pure and undefiled religion" will be found! This is a melancholy view indeed of the Christian world; but it is the view which God himself gives us of it; and it is in vain for us to controvert it; for by his decision we must stand or fall [x].]

2. As a directory whereby to regulate our conduct—

[The

[q] 1 John iv. 4, 5. [r] ib. ver. 10, 11. [s] Heb. vi. 9, 10.
[t] 1 Cor. xiii. 1—3. [u] 1 John iii. 17—19. [x] See Matt. xxv. 34—46.

[The commands of God relative to these things are clear and express: "Come out from the world, and be separate, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty[y]." Nor is the law respecting sympathy at all less forcibly enjoined: "Bear ye one another's burthens, and so fulfil the law of Christ[z]."

In a word, I call upon you all to obey these great commands. Remember, it is not to any peculiarities of a sect that we are urging you, but to that which God himself dignifies with the name of "pure and undefiled religion."

Say not, "This is not my office: I cannot thus come out from the world, nor can I thus devote myself to deeds of charity." I readily grant that all cannot consecrate an equal measure of their time or property to these offices: but no man in the universe has any dispensation from devoting such a measure of his time and property to these things as his situation and circumstances will admit of. The command is equally obligatory on all: and a disposition to obey it ought to be equally strong on all: the various modes of our obedience will be judged of by God himself, who alone knows what our respective states and circumstances require. But this I say, "He that soweth liberally shall reap liberally; and he that soweth sparingly, shall reap also sparingly." Respecting the excellence of such religion I dare appeal to your own consciences. See a person, whether of higher or lower rank, laying aside the cares and pleasures of the world, and visiting the abodes of misery: See the disconsolate "widow, and the helpless children," bemoaning their bereavement, whilst to the anguish occasioned by so severe a loss, the pressure of poverty is added; and, to the want of immediate sustenance, the prospect of permanent and irremediable distress: See the compassionate Visitor opening the sources of consolation which the Gospel affords, till the unhappy sufferers are brought to kiss the rod that smites them: See him administering present relief, and devising means for the future support of the family: How is he received as an angel from heaven! And how does "the widow's heart even sing with joy," whilst she acknowledges the hand of God in these succours, and, with feelings too big for utterance, adores her Heavenly Benefactor! Go ye, Beloved, to such scenes as these, and ye will soon begin to see the beauty of religion, and to understand that paradox, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Yea, realize one such scene as this, and ye will need no further persuasion to assist the charity before us, or to emulate the zeal of those who are most active in it[a].]

[y] 2 Cor. vi. 17, 18. [z] Gal. vi. 2.

[a] The particular Institution may here be more fully opened and be further recommended by either local, or general, considerations.

MCXLV.

THE LAW OF LIBERTY.

Jam. ii. 12. *So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty.*

THE law of works contained in the Ten Commandments is continued in force under the Gospel dispensation, *as a rule of life.* This appears from the frequent reference which is made to it in the New Testament *in this particular view.* St. Paul, in his Epistle to the Romans, when inculcating the duty of love, says, "Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled *the law*.... for love is the fulfilling of *the law*[a]." In like manner St. James, condemning an undue respect of persons which had obtained to a great extent in the Christian Church, says, "If ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of *the law* as transgressors[b]." The difference which exists between the law and the Gospel, is not that the Gospel dispenses with any thing which the law had enjoined, but that it requires the same things *in a different manner;* the law inculcating them as the means of obtaining life; the Gospel requiring them as the means of honouring God, and of manifesting that life which God has already imparted to the soul. The law in its requirements begets a spirit of *bondage:* but the Gospel, whilst its requirements are the same, operates as "a law of *liberty;*" inspiring us with motives of a more ingenuous kind, and at the same time imparting to the Believer such powerful assistance as renders obedience easy and delightful. Hence the Apostle, shewing that the conduct which he was reproving was condemned by the Gospel no less than by the law, (for the Gospel itself declares, that "he shall have judgment without mercy, who has shewn no mercy[c],") intreats the whole Christian Church "so to speak, and so to act, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty."

Now in these words we see,

I. The true character of the Gospel—

It

[a] Rom. xiii. 8—10. [b] ver. 9. [c] ver. 13.

It is a law, and has all the force of a law, and must be obeyed on pain of God's heavy displeasure; but it is "a law of liberty:" and this it is,

1. As freeing men from *the guilt* of sin—

[The Gospel proclaims, to all who receive it, pardon and peace. It holds forth a Saviour, who has bought us with his blood, and by the sacrifice of himself has effected our reconciliation with the offended Majesty of heaven. It declares, that "by receiving that Saviour," however guilty we may have been in times past, "we shall have the privilege of becoming the sons of God[d]"———In this it differs widely from the law: the law knew nothing of pardon: it simply said, "Do this, and live:" and if in one single instance it was violated, all hopes of acceptance by it were destroyed for ever[e]. A certain kind of forgiveness indeed was obtained by the offering of certain sacrifices: but it was only such a measure of it as exempted the person from present punishment, but could never procure acceptance for him in the eternal world; and hence, as "it could never really take away sins," it could "never make any man perfect as pertaining to the conscience[f]." Moreover, there were some sins for which no sacrifice whatever could be received. But the Gospel offers a *full* and *everlasting* remission from *all* sins, and declares, that "all who believe, are justified from all things, even from those from which they could never (even in appearance) be justified by the law of Moses[g]." Thus by announcing to the whole world, that "there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus[h]," the Gospel may justly be called "A law of liberty."]

2. As freeing men from the power of sin—

[The promise which the Gospel makes to all who truly receive it, is this; "Sin shall not have dominion over you; for ye are not under the law, but under grace[i]." And, whilst it gives this assurance to its votaries, it imparts to them the power of carrying into effect. The person who is united unto Christ by faith, is like a cion, which when engrafted into a tree, lives by virtue derived from the tree, and is enabled from that time to bring forth its appropriate fruits. Our Lord in this view says, "I am the vine; ye are the branches. He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me, or separate from me, ye can do nothing[k]." In this again the Gospel differs widely from the law: for, whilst the law issued its commands, it imparted no power to obey them:

[d] John i. 12.
[e] Compare ver. 10. with Gal. iii. 10.
[f] Heb. ix. 9. & x. 1—4.
[g] Acts xiii. 39.
[h] Rom. viii. 1.
[i] Rom. vi. 14.
[k] John xv. 1, 5.

them: but the Gospel conveys to the soul of the Believer such a measure of strength, as enables it to mortify sin, and to abound in all the fruits of righteousness to the praise and glory of God. This is what St. Paul expressly tells us: "*The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus*, that is, the Gospel, (which St. James in nearly similar terms calls '*the law of liberty*,') hath *made me free* from the law of sin and death: for *what the law could not do*, in that it was weak through the flesh, God, sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, (hath done; that is, he hath) condemned sin in the flesh; that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit[l]."

I may add, that the Gospel gives us a more liberal spirit, in that it does not force us to do what is hateful to us, but disposes us willingly to take upon us the yoke of Christ, and renders "his yoke easy, and his burthen light." The current of a Believer's affections is changed by it[m]; so that, though he still feels the workings of corruption strong within him, he "delights in the law of God after his inward man[n]," and "has his conversation in heaven," as the Unbeliever has on earth[o].

Thus does "the law of faith[p]" make men free[q];" and "the liberty which they receive from Christ renders them free indeed[r]."]

The Apostle, in calling men's attention to the law of liberty, marks,

II. Our duty in relation to it—

If we have been made free by the Gospel, we are bound to regard it,

1. As *our* rule *of conduct here*—

[The substance of all its commands is comprehended in one word, Love. As he that loveth fulfils the law, so he that loves fulfils the Gospel also; as St. Paul has said; "Bear ye one another's burthens, and so fulfil the law of Christ[s]." But here we must particularly observe, that our obedience to this law is not restricted to overt acts: our whole spirit must accord with it, and be moulded by it. If we notice the particular conduct which the Apostle reproves, we shall find, that it was not such as would have brought down censure from the world at large: it would rather have been commended as a respect due to the higher orders of society. But, when strictly examined, it was contrary to the principle of love: and that was quite

[l] Rom. viii. 2, 3.
[m] Col. iii. 2.
[n] Rom. vii. 22.
[o] Phil. iii. 19, 20.
[p] Rom. iii. 27.
[q] John viii. 32.
[r] ib. ver. 36.
[s] Gal. vi. 2.

quite sufficient to render it an object of severest reprobation. The doing as we would be done unto forms the proper standard for our conduct towards all mankind: and if, either in word or deed, we deviate from that, we transgress that holy law which we are bound to obey. How far this heavenly principle extends, may be seen in the description given of it by St. Paul: and, if we do not in the constant habit of our minds endeavour to attain to it, we may believe what we will, and do what we will, and suffer what we may, but, after all, we shall be only "as sounding brass, and as tinkling cymbals[t]."]

2. As *God's* rule *of judgment hereafter*—

[By this law we shall be judged in the last day. It is remarkable, that in the account which our Lord gives us of the final judgment, there is no mention made of any actual transgression as determining the fate of the ungodly: their performance of the offices of love is the only subject of inquiry; and their neglect of them is the only ground that is specified for their eternal condemnation[u]." Of course, I must not be understood to say, that this will really be the *only* subject of inquiry, or the *only* ground of a sinner's condemnation; for no doubt the whole of men's lives will be taken into the account in fixing their eternal destiny: but it is the only thing mentioned by our Lord in his account of that day: and this is sufficient to shew us the vast importance of keeping it ever in our view. We must attend to it no less in our *words*, than in our *actions*; and "so *speak*, and so *do*, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty."]

That we may bring home this subject more powerfully to your hearts, we would intreat you to bear in mind the main points contained in it:

REMEMBER,

1. The true nature of the Gospel—

[Men universally conceive of the Gospel as *a system of restraints*: and, when we call upon them to obey the Gospel, they consider us as attempting to abridge their liberty. But the very reverse of this is true. We find men slaves to the world, and sin, and Satan; and we come to break their chains, and to set them at liberty. Our blessed Lord proclaimed this as the great object of his mission, "to preach deliverance to the captives, and to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord[x]." There are now, as there were in the Jewish state, many who love their bonds, and account the service of their Master preferable to the liberty that is proclaimed. But this does not at all change the nature of the Gospel, which is altogether

[t] 1 Cor. xiii. 1—7. [u] Matt. xxv. 34—46. [x] Luke iv. 18, 19.

gether "a law of liberty" to all who truly embrace it. Do not then imagine, that, when we would induce you to renounce all the lords that have had dominion over you, we would bring you into bondage, or deprive you of any thing that will conduce to your real happiness. We make our appeal to yourselves, and ask, Whether what you have hitherto considered as liberty, has not been in reality the sorest bondage? We ask, Whether sin has not kept you from the love and service of God, and bound you as with adamantine chains to the objects of time and sense? We ask, Whether in proportion as you were brought to the employment and felicity of the heavenly hosts, you would not attain to perfect freedom? To all then we say, Believe in Christ, and give yourselves up to him, and ye shall then "be delivered from the bondage of corruption, into the glorious liberty of the children of God[y]."]

2. Its proper tendency—

[Strange as the inconsistency is, the very persons who will exclaim against the Gospel as making the way to heaven so strait that nobody can walk in it, will cry out against it also as a licentious doctrine, and will represent the preachers of it as saying, that men may live as they please, provided only they believe. But the Gospel is "a doctrine according to godliness;" and the very "grace of God which bringeth salvation, teaches men to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live righteously, soberly, and godly in this present world." The Gospel, it is true, is "a law of liberty;" but not of liberty *to live in* sin: it is a liberty *from* sin; and a liberty *in* the ways of God. Instead of superseding morality, it raises the tone of morals to the highest possible pitch, requiring us to "walk in all things as Christ walked," and to "purify ourselves even as he is pure." And, whilst it sets up this high standard for our attainment, it sets up the same for our trial in the last day; and requires us so to speak and so to do, as they that shall be tried and judged by it. Know therefore, that notwithstanding the Gospel is as free for all as the light we see and the air we breathe, its proper tendency is to assimilate us to God, whose name and nature is LOVE[z].]

3. The wisdom of all who profess to have embraced it—

[Doubtless it is your privilege to be rejoicing in God your Saviour, and in the freeness and fulness of his salvation———But you must also keep in view the future judgment, and be acting continually with a reference to it. There is no dispensation given to you to continue in sin: "Shall you continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid." The

[y] Rom. viii. 21.

[z] 1 John iv. 8, 16.

The scrutiny which you shall undergo in the last day, so far from being less exact than that of others, will be more strict, in proportion to the advantages you have enjoyed, and the professions you have made[a]. Your acceptance, it is true, will be solely on account of what the Lord Jesus Christ has done and suffered for you: but the truth of your faith will be tried by the works it has produced: and according to the measure and quality of them will be your reward. I say then, In all that you say and do, have respect to the future judgment, when "God will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the heart:" and in order to your being approved of God in that day, "walk in love, as Christ has loved you[b];" and, whilst you endeavour to "walk in his *steps*," "let the same *mind* also be in you as was in Christ Jesus[c]."]

[a] 1 Pet. iv. 17. [b] Eph. v. 2. [c] Phil. ii. 5.

MCXLVI.

JUSTIFICATION BY WORKS EXPLAINED.

Jam. ii. 24. *Ye see then, how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.*

CERTAINLY, of all the questions that can occupy the human mind, the first and greatest is, "How shall man be just before God[a]?" On this subject men have differed from each other, as far as the east is from the west. To this difference the passage before us has not a little contributed. It is therefore most desirable that we enter candidly into the investigation of it, and endeavour to ascertain with all possible precision what is so indispensable to our eternal welfare.

It is obvious, that the words which I have read to you are a deduction from a preceding argument. We ought therefore carefully to examine the argument itself; for, it is only by a thorough knowledge of the premises that we can understand the conclusion drawn from them. Suppose that I were, as a conclusion of an argument, to say, 'So then man is an immortal Being;' if the argument itself were not investigated, you might understand it as a denial of man's

[a] Job ix. 2.

man's mortality: but, if the argument shewed, that the conclusion referred to his soul alone, the conclusion would be found perfectly consistent with an apparently opposite position, namely, That man is a mortal Being. In like manner, if the Apostle's argument in the preceding context be candidly examined, there will be found no real inconsistency between the deduction contained in the text, and an apparently opposite deduction which may be founded on premises altogether different.

Let us consider then,

I. The Apostle's argument—

The first thing to be inquired is, Whence the argument arose? or, *What was the occasion of it?*

[St. James was reproving an evil which obtained to a very great extent among the Church in his day; namely, the shewing partiality to the richer members, whilst the poorer were treated with supercilious contempt, and harassed with the most flagrant acts of oppression[b]. Now, as this was directly contrary to the whole spirit of Christianity, he introduced his reproof with these words; "My Brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of Glory, with respect of persons[c]." NOW THESE WORDS, DULY NOTICED, WILL GIVE A CLUE TO THE WHOLE. "Have not *the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ* with respect of persons:" HOLD NOT THE TRUE FAITH IN SO ERRONEOUS AND UNWORTHY A MANNER. He then proceeds to shew, that a faith productive of no better conduct than that, will never justify, "never *save*," the soul[d]: for that it is a dead faith, and not a living one, "a mere carcase, and not a living body[e]."]

The next thing we have to do is, to *trace the steps of his argument*—

[Having reproved the partiality before mentioned, he shews, that it is alike contrary both to the law and to the Gospel: to the law, the very essence of which is love, (which if any person habitually violates, he violates the whole law[f]): and to the Gospel; which inspires its votaries with a more liberal spirit[g], and declares, that the person who exercises not mercy to his brethren, of whatever class they may be, shall find no mercy at the hands of God[h].

He then *appeals* to the whole Church; and calls upon them to say, Whether any person *so holding the faith of Christ* can be

[b] ver. 2—6. [c] ver. 1. [d] ver. 14. [e] ver. 26.
[f] ver. 8—11. [g] ver. 12. [h] ver. 13.

be saved? and Whether all the faith whereon he builds his confidence, be not a nullity, and a delusion? "What doth it profit, my Brethren, though a man *say* he hath faith, and have not works? can faith, *such a faith as that*, save him[i]?"

He then proceeds to shew how vain any man's pretences to *love* would be, if it were as inoperative as this faith. "If a brother or sister be naked, and be destitute of daily food; and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed, and be ye filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit[k]?" Could that person be said to possess any *real love?* or would such a love as that be approved and rewarded by God? Certainly not. "Even so then," says he, "*faith*, if it have not works, is dead, being alone[l]:" and any person before whom you might boast of such a faith as that, might justly reply, "Shew me thy faith without thy works, (which you can never do:) and I will shew thee my faith by my works[m];" which is the only test to which such pretensions can be referred. Nay more, such a faith as that is no better than the faith of devils. "The devils believe that there is one God: and *they tremble;*" but *they do not love.* So you may believe that Jesus Christ is a Saviour; and *you may be partially affected by that persuasion:* but, *if you do not love*, your faith is no better than theirs: and, by pretending to a living and saving faith, when you have nothing but a dead and inoperative faith, you only shew, that you are a "vain," ignorant, and self-deluded "man[n]."

He now goes on to confirm these assertions by an appeal to the Scriptures themselves. "Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect[o]?" Abraham believed in the promised Seed, "in whom all the nations of the earth should be blessed." But what kind of a faith was his? Was it unproductive of holy obedience? No: it led him to obey the hardest command that was ever given to mortal man, even to slay, and to reduce to ashes upon the altar, that very son, to whom the promises were made, and through whom alone they could ever be accomplished: so that *his works* evinced the truth and sincerity of his faith; and *proved indisputably, that he was accepted of his God.* His faith existed before: but now it operated; and "was made perfect by the works which it produced;" just as a tree is then only in a state of complete perfection, when it is laden with its proper fruits. The fruit indeed does not add to the vegetative power that produced it; but it evinces that power, and displays

[i] ver. 14. [k] ver. 15, 16. [l] ver. 17.
[m] ver. 18. [n] ver. 19, 20. [o] ver. 21, 22.

displays it in full perfection: and so did Abraham's works evince the truth of the faith which previously existed in him, and complete the objects for which it had been bestowed. "And then was fulfilled the Scripture which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called, The friend of God[p]." The same he illustrates by another instance from Scripture, even that of Rahab, who evinced the truth of her faith, and was accepted in the exercise of it, when at the peril of her life she concealed the Jewish spies, and sent them home in safety to their own camp[q].

Now from all this he draws, as an unquestionable deduction, that very truth, which in the first instance he had only asserted; namely, that persons, whatever degrees of faith they might pretend to, could never be accepted of God, unless their faith wrought by love: "Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only:" for as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also[r].]

Thus viewed, the argument is clear from beginning to end. That the terms which are used are strong, is certain: but then they may be accounted for from the general drift of the argument, and its immense importance to the Church of God. The Apostles do not measure words and syllables as we are apt to do, but speak in broad unqualified terms. St. Paul had done so on the subject of a sinner's acceptance by faith alone: and St. James does so on the subject of those vain pretences to faith which were made by many who were destitute of good works: but an attention to the scope of their respective arguments will lead us to a just view, both of the terms which they use, and of the conclusions at which they arrive. St. James's argument we have seen. Let us now attend to,

II. The conclusion drawn from it—

This must accord with the argument on which it is founded. If we make the premises refer to one thing, and the conclusion to another, or, if we make the conclusion

[p] ver. 23. [q] ver. 25.

[r] ver. 24, 26. If ver. 25 were put into a parenthesis, the connexion between ver. 24 and ver. 26 would more plainly appear, and the argument stand more full and complete.

conclusion broader than the premises, we destroy the argument altogether, and make the Apostle reason, not only as if he were not inspired, but as if he were not endowed with common sense. What then does his conclusion amount to? it amounts to this:

1. That the future judgment will proceed on grounds of perfect equity—

[God could, if it pleased him, assign to every man his portion in the eternal world, according to what he has seen existing in the heart. But it is his intention to shew before the whole universe, that, as the Governor and the Judge of all, he dispenses rewards and punishments on grounds which are not arbitrary, but strictly equitable. On this account the day of judgment is called "the day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God[s]." If the judgment were passed on men solely on grounds which none but God could see, it would be impossible for any one to judge of the equity of his proceedings: but when the works of all are brought forth as witnesses of the inward dispositions and habits of their minds, all can see the correctness of the estimate which is formed of men's characters, and the justice of the sentence that is passed upon them. This then is one part of the conclusion which the Apostle arrives at in the words before us: God will not judge of men by their faith, which he alone can discern, but by their works, which all may judge of as soon as ever they are laid before them. A man may pretend to faith of the strongest kind: but the inquiry will be, What effects did it produce? And, if the fruits which it produced were such as were insufficient to attest its genuine truth and excellence, they will be utterly disregarded; and God will say, "Depart from me, I never knew you, ye workers of iniquity[t]." However confidently the truth and genuineness of it may be asserted by the persons themselves, God will not at all regard it, but will bring every thing to the test which is here established, and condemn or justify every man according to his works[u].]

2. That faith, of whatever kind it be, is of no value, any farther than it is attested by works—

[If faith in the first instance apprehends Christ as a Saviour from guilt and condemnation, it does not rest there: it lays hold on him for sanctification, as well as for righteousness[x]; and would account him not worthy of the name of Jesus, if he did not save his people from their sins[y]. The characters given

[s] Rom. ii. 5. [t] Matt. vii. 21—23. [u] Matt. xii. 36, 37.
[x] 1 Cor. i. 30. [y] Matt. i. 21.

given to faith in the Inspired Volume are inseparable from it: it works by love[z], and overcomes the world[a], and purifies the heart[b]: and if it produce not these effects, it will never benefit the soul. Knowing therefore in what way God will appreciate it hereafter, it becomes us to form a correct estimate of it now; and to weigh ourselves in the balance of the sanctuary now, that we may not be found wanting in the day of judgment.]

It will here be expected, of course, that we answer a common OBJECTION to the foregoing statement—

[It is said that St. Paul's sentiments and declarations on this subject are directly opposed to those of St. James; since, after a long argument, he comes to this conclusion: "Therefore we conclude, that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law[c]." He goes farther still, and says, that "to him that *worketh not*, but believeth in him that *justifieth the ungodly*, his faith is counted for righteousness[d]." Now it may well be asked, 'How can this be reconciled with the foregoing statement?' I answer, 'Only examine St. Paul's argument, as you have that of St. James, and you will see that there is no opposition at all between their respective assertions. The two Apostles are writing on two different subjects. St. Paul is proving that a man is not to seek salvation by any righteousness of his own, but simply by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ: whereas St. James is proving, that the man who professes to have faith in Christ, must shew forth his faith by his works. St. Paul endeavours to convince the self-justiciary; St. James, the Antinomian;—St. Paul, by shewing, that works are nothing without faith; St. James, by shewing, that faith is nothing without works. St. Paul exalts Christ, as giving a title to heaven; St. James, as giving a meetness for heaven. St. Paul bends the whole force of his mind to establish the one leading doctrine of the Gospel; St. James, to have that doctrine adorned. Thus, according to the two Apostles, a man is justified *by faith*, because *by it* he *is made* righteous; and he is justified *by works*, because *by them* he *is proved* righteous: and God in justifying him, whether on the one ground, or the other, approves himself both "a just God and a Saviour." We may render this matter somewhat more clear by means of a familiar illustration. A cion must be engrafted into a stock in order that it may live: and it must bring forth fruit in order to prove that it does live. Is there any opposition between these two assertions? None whatever. So then with Paul I assert, that man must be

[z] Gal. v. 6. [a] 1 John v. 4. [b] Acts xv. 9.
[c] Rom. iii. 28. [d] Rom. iv. 5.

be engrafted into Christ by faith, in order that he may live: and with St. James I assert, that he must bring forth fruits of righteousness, to prove that he does live. Without being engrafted into the stock, he can have no life: and, if he bring not forth good works, he shews that he has no life. These two positions are perfectly compatible with each other: and so, when properly understood, are the apparently opposite positions of these two Apostles.]

Hoping now that I have set the whole of this matter in a clear light, I CONCLUDE with a few words,

1. Of caution—

[Two things in particular I would caution you against: first, *Do not separate faith and works*; and next, *Do not confound them.*

Do not separate them, or imagine that you can be saved by either of them apart from the other: for faith, if it be alone, is dead: and works, if they be alone, leave you altogether destitute of any interest in Christ. If your faith be strong enough to remove mountains, yet, if it work not by love, it will leave you no better than "sounding brass, or tinkling cymbals." And if your works be ever so perfect, they can never exceed what the law requires of you; and consequently, can never discharge the debt which you owe to God for your past violations of it: nor indeed can you ever in your present imperfect state fulfil the law so perfectly as not to come short of it every day you live: and consequently, every day you live, you stand in need of mercy for your daily transgressions, instead of purchasing heaven by your super-abounding merits.

On the other hand, *Do not confound the two,* as though you were to be saved by faith and works united; or to have a first justification by faith, and a second justification by works. Either the one or the other of these errors will invalidate the whole Gospel; and will rob Christ of his glory, and you of your salvation. Christ is the only Saviour of sinful man: and his righteousness is that in which alone any Child of man can be accepted before God. If you join any thing with that, you make it void: and, as far as respects you, "Christ will have died in vain[e]." The true way of salvation is this: Go to Christ as a sinner: and seek salvation altogether through his atoning sacrifice, and his obedience unto death. But, when you have believed in him, be careful to "maintain good works," yea, and to "excel in" good works[f]. Then will Christ be honoured in every way: your faith will honour him as the alone Saviour of mankind; and your works will honour him as your Lord and Master. But remember to keep each in its place. In building an edifice, you do not build the superstructure first, (if I may so speak,) and then lay the foundation

[e] Gal. v 2, 4. [f] Tit. iii. 8. προΐστασθαι.

tion afterwards; nor do you mingle the foundation and superstructure in one indiscriminate mass: but you keep each in its place; and then it answers the end for which it was raised. So you must lay Christ as your foundation first; and afterwards raise on him the superstructure of good works: then shall you be found "workmen that need not be ashamed;" and both in your faith and in your works be justified before God.]

2. Of encouragement—

[Let not any apparent difficulties in this subject embarrass you. They will all vanish in an instant, if only you get a broken and contrite heart. It is surprising what light such a state of mind will reflect on the subject before us. It may not indeed enable you to solve all the *verbal* difficulties that may be raised: but, as far as relates to the main subject, it will scatter all doubts, as mist is scattered by the noon-day sun. It will convince you that no righteousness but that of Christ can ever avail for your acceptance before God: and, at the same time, that holiness is no less necessary for your final enjoyment of his favour. It will convince you too, that both faith and holiness, being the gifts of God, you have no reason to despair of attaining all that is necessary to your complete salvation; since God is pledged "not to despise the contrite heart," or to withhold from his upright people the blessings either of grace or glory[s].

[s] Ps. lxxxiv. 11.

MCXLVII.

INFLUENCE OF WISDOM UPON THE CONDUCT.

Jam. iii. 13. *Who is a wise man, and endued with knowledge amongst you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom.*

THE government of the tongue is of all things the most difficult; because every evil that is in the heart seeks for vent through that organ. A man who should be able so to control it that no unadvised word should ever escape from his lips, would be a perfect man. Yet, if a man profess to be religious, and have not so much self-government as to impose an habitual restraint upon his tongue, he deceives his own soul, and his religion is vain[a]. The gift of speech is to be improved for God by holy and heavenly

[a] Jam. i. 26.

venly communications, and the man who suffers it to be a vehicle of sin, discovers himself to be a hypocrite before God. The inconsistency of such conduct is obvious. "A fountain cannot send forth both fresh water and bitter; nor can a tree bear both olives and figs:" so neither can a renewed heart bear such different and discordant fruits[b]. Whoever therefore professes godliness, should take care that no such inconsistency be found in him. "Who is a wise man, and endued with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom."

In these words we see,

I. The proper character of Christians—

When we say that the Christian is "a wise man, and endued with knowledge," we seem to be guilty of great arrogance; since it is a notorious fact, that the great majority of religious persons, as St. Paul himself acknowledges, are of the lower orders of society, whose talents and attainments are extremely limited[c]. And even where the disadvantages of education are not so great, it is often found that "the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light." How then can we presume to designate the godly by such inappropriate and high-sounding names? I answer, that the wisdom of this world is in God's estimation, folly; and that his people alone deserve the titles that are here assigned them. They are wise and intelligent,

1. As fearing God—

[They all without exception fear God. This is the lowest attainment that will justify any pretensions to true piety. And what is said of it by holy Job? "The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding[d]." Here then at once is their character fixed by the testimony of God himself. And to them does it belong exclusively: for of all others the prophet Jeremiah says, "They have rejected the word of the Lord; and, What wisdom is in them[e]?" They may possess much which passes under that name: they may be skilled in arts and sciences, even as Solomon himself: yet

[b] ver. 9—12.
[c] 1 Cor. i. 26—28.
[d] Job xxviii. 28.
[e] Jer. viii. 9.

yet they shew that they are fools and ideots, as it respects the things of God. They shew that they know not the true end of their being: they know not wherein real happiness consists: they know not the value of an immortal soul: they know not the judgment that awaits them, or the importance of preparing for it. Their views are circumscribed by the things of time and sense; and of heaven and heavenly things they have no knowledge. "Their wisdom and knowledge, such as it is, only perverts them[f]." Hence of them it is said, that "madness is in their hearts while they live[g]." But of the Lord's people, how ignorant soever they may be of other matters, it may be said, as on this very ground it was said of the Jews of old, "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people[h]."]

2. As instructed by God himself—

[This also is peculiar to them, and abundantly vindicates their title to the character given them in the text. To them universally, and to them exclusively, does that promise belong, "They shall all be taught of God[i]." They are taught of God, who by his Spirit has "opened the eyes of their understanding[k]," and "brought them out of darkness into the marvellous light of his Gospel[l]." To them he has given a spiritual discernment, whereby they are enabled to discern the things of the Spirit[m]. He has given to them such views of Christ as "flesh and blood could never have revealed to them[n]." "Wonderful things are they enabled to behold in God's law[o]." They see—what others have no conception of—the spirituality of that law, extending to every thought and desire of the heart. They see in that glass the unsearchable wickedness of their own hearts[p]; their just desert of God's wrath and indignation; their utter need of a Saviour; the suitableness of Christ to their extreme necessities, and his sufficiency for all their wants. "They have an understanding given them to know Him that is true; and, in consequence of that, they are in Him that is true, even in the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the true God and eternal life[q]." To them are made known things which from all eternity were hid in God; and things which the natural man, whatever be his endowments, cannot receive or know[r]: yea, though they be in every other respect mere "babes, to them God has revealed what he has hid from the wise and prudent[s]:" so that, whilst the man of learning, that is wise in his own conceit, looks down upon them with contempt as weak and foolish, they see the

[f] Isai. xlvii. 10. [g] Eccl. ix. 3. [h] Deut. iv. 6. [i] John vi. 45.
[k] Eph. i. 17, 18. [l] 1 Pet. ii. 9. [m] 1 Cor. ii. 9—12.
[n] Matt. xvi. 16, 17. [o] Ps. cxix. 18. [p] 1 Kin. viii. 38. [q] 1 John v. 20.
[r] 1 Cor. ii. 7, 8, 14. [s] Matt. xi. 25.

the vanity of all his boasted wisdom, and they pity the blindness of his deluded mind. See how strongly all this is asserted by the apostle Paul: "He that is spiritual (however destitute he may be of human learning) judgeth all things: yet he himself is judged of no man: (he estimates rightly the state of others, whilst they can form no just estimate of his:) for who (what carnal man) hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct *him?* But *we* (we who are taught of God) *have* the mind of Christ;" and consequently can form a correct judgment both of our own state and theirs[t]. Thus, whilst all others are "perishing for lack of knowledge[u]," they have "that unction of the Holy One whereby they know all things[x]," and are become truly wise, being made "wise unto salvation through faith in Christ[y]."]

Such being their high character, they are concerned to know, and to consider well,

II. The conduct that befits them—

Doubtless their deportment should be such as is suited to the distinguished rank which they bear amongst their fellows: and their superiority to others should be marked,

1. In their works—

[Their whole "conversation should be such as becometh the Gospel of Christ[z]." A tree must be known by its fruits; and their faith be judged of by their works[a]. The whole tenor of these must be good: and, though they are not to be done with a view to man's applause, they must be such as to evince to all around them the excellence of the principles which they profess: "they must make their light so to shine before men, that all who behold their good works may glorify their Father that is in heaven[b]." They must "*shew* out of a good *conversation* their *works*."

But in relation to these (their works) the godly will find no difficulty, if they attend to that which is principally adverted to in our text, namely, to walk worthy of their profession.]

2. In their spirit—

[The Christian is renewed, not in knowledge or in the outward conduct only, but "in *the spirit of his mind*[c]." He is poured into a new mould, the mould of the Gospel[d]. He is assimilated to the Lord Jesus Christ himself, especially in the meekness and gentleness of his spirit under the heaviest trials, and the bitterest provocations. Of him we are told, that

[t] 1 Cor. ii. 15, 16. [u] Hos. iv. 6. [x] 1 John ii. 20, 27.
[y] 2 Tim. iii. 15. [z] Phil. i. 27. [a] Jam. i. 18.
[b] Matt. v. 16. [c] Eph. iv. 23. [d] Rom. vi. 17, the Greek,

that "he was led as a lamb to the slaughter; and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so opened he not his mouth[e]:" and in that particular he is more especially commended to us as an example: for "he suffered, leaving us an example, that we should follow his steps; who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth; who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously[f]." This is the state which God approves. The outward act is *comparatively* of little value in his sight; since that may abound, even where the inward principle is most corrupt: but when he sees "*the hidden man of the heart*" thus habited, he views it with delight: "the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit is in his sight of great price[g]." This is what the Apostle so beautifully inculcates in our text: "Let him shew out of a good conversation his works *with meekness of wisdom*." Meekness and wisdom are intimately and indissolubly connected: as it is said, "He that is hasty of spirit, exalteth folly; whereas he who is slow to wrath, is of great understanding[h]." In this then must every true Christian excel: and it will be in vain for him to pretend that he has been taught of God, if he have not learned, and practically too, this important lesson. Do you ask how the true Christian must be distinguished? St. Paul shall tell you: "Put on, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye[i]." This is the proper test of your principles. If you have knowledge, it is well: if you have faith, it is well: if you have works, it is well: but you may "have the knowledge of men and angels, and a faith that can remove mountains; and such zeal, both of an active and passive kind, as may lead you to give all your goods to feed the poor, and your bodies to be burned, and yet, after all, want that internal principle of love, which is necessary to your acceptance with God[k]." Your proper character is, that you are "the meek of the earth: seek righteousness therefore, and seek meekness.[l]" "I beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ[m]," that you cultivate this spirit to the uttermost: for, if you have not in this respect "the mind that was in Christ Jesus[n]," you are not, you cannot be, his[o].]

For the more extensive improvement of this subject, I would add two solemn ADMONITIONS:

1. Rest

[e] Isai. liii. 7. [f] 1 Pet. ii. 21—23. [g] 1 Pet. iii. 4.
[h] Prov. xiv. 29. [i] Col. iii. 12, 13. [k] 1 Cor. xiii. 1—3.
[l] Zeph. ii. 3. [m] 2 Cor. x. 1. [n] Phil. ii. 5.
[o] 1 John iii. 24. & iv. 17.

1. Rest not in attainments, whilst destitute of knowledge—

[There is a great diversity in the natural dispositions of men: some are from their very birth more meek and gentle than others: and certainly they whom nature has formed in this better mould, have much to be thankful for. But let not any one mistake this natural gentleness for grace. The meekness of which my text speaks, is "a fruit of the Spirit[p]," and is always associated with true wisdom. It springs from a sense of our own unworthiness, and of the obligations which we owe to Christ for all the wonders of redeeming love. It is a humble submission to almighty God, whose hand is viewed in all events, and whose love is tasted in the bitterest dispensations. It is a resignation of the soul to him, that he may perfect it in his own way, and glorify himself upon it, as seemeth him good. Before you draw inferences then from your comparative proficiency in gentle habits, inquire how they have been obtained? Examine whether they are associated with this heavenly wisdom; and whether they are the result of deep humiliation, and of ardent love to God? If you have not been taught of God to know yourselves and the Lord Jesus Christ, you are in darkness even until now: and though you appear to be in the fold of Christ, you have never entered it at the strait gate, and therefore are not regarded by him as his sheep indeed. Oh! may God instruct you, and by his Holy Spirit guide you into all truth!]

2. Rest not in knowledge, whilst destitute of these attainments—

[Many possess a very clear knowledge of Scripture truths, whilst yet they experience not their sanctifying and tranforming efficacy. It is a melancholy fact, that many who profess religion are grievously under the dominion of evil tempers. It was evidently so among those to whom St. James addressed this epistle. But, Beloved, "these things ought not so to be," and must not so be: for, if they be, they will terminate in fearful disappointment at the last day. Think not to excuse yourselves by saying, That your temper is naturally hasty and violent. It may be so: but this is no reason why it is to have the mastery over you. If the struggles which you have to maintain be the greater, the strength of Christ shall be the more displayed in the victories which he will enable you to gain. Only go to him in fervent and continual prayer, and you shall find, that "his grace is sufficient for you:" it never failed yet; nor shall it ever fail, when sought in sincerity and truth. Only prostrate yourselves before him with shame and sorrow and contrition, and implore

[p] Gal. v. 22, 23.

plore of him the assistance of his good Spirit; and then will he "beautify you with salvation[q]:" for "instead of the thorn shall grow up the fir-tree, and instead of the brier shall grow up the myrtle-tree: and you shall be to the Lord for a name, and for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off[r]."]

[q] Ps. cxlix. 4. [r] Isai. lv. 13.

MCXLVIII.

THE NATURE AND EFFECTS OF TRUE RELIGION.

Jam. iii. 17. *The wisdom that is from above, is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.*

RELIGION, like a tree, must be judged of by its fruits—

That which savours of pride, earthliness, or sensuality, is not of God—

Its character is justly drawn in the words before us—It is,

I. Holy in its nature—

Religion, above all other things, is entitled to the name of "wisdom"—

[It enlightens the mind, informs the judgment, regulates the life—

And he who lives under its influence, is wise in the estimation of God himself—]

Being from above, it resembles its Divine Author—

[Religion is a beam issuing from God the fountain of light—

And, as "in him is no darkness at all," so neither is there any thing impure in that which flows from him—

It may be mixed with sin, but in its own nature it is "pure"—

And, in proportion as it prevails, it will dissipate the clouds of ignorance and sin[s]—

All "spiritual or fleshly filthiness" will surely vanish before it[s]—]

In consequence of this it is,

II. Useful in its tendency—It renders us,

1. Amiable in our spirit—

[Though

[s] Matt. v. 8. Acts xv. 9. 2 Cor. vii. 1.

[Though men differ widely in their natural tempers, yet the unregenerate are, on many occasions, quarrelsome, fierce, implacable—

But as soon as ever religion exerts its influence on our minds, we mortify these unhallowed tempers, and become "peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated"—

From thenceforth it is the delight of our souls to cultivate and promote peace, to maintain in ourselves a meek and quiet spirit, and to exercise, as occasion may require, forbearance and forgiveness to all around us—]

2. Benevolent in our conduct—

[Compassion and diligence are inseparable attributes of true religion—

The real Christian is not, like the barren fig-tree, covered with the leaves of an outward profession, but destitute of fruit—

He labours to abound in every good word and work, and to benefit to the utmost the bodies and souls of his fellow-creatures—

His heart is "full" of love, and out of the abundance of his heart he both speaks and acts—]

It is within us a living principle, that is,

III. Uniform in its operations—It extends,

1. To duties without limitation—

[The grace of God will not admit of "partiality" in our obedience—

It will stimulate us to difficult and self-denying duties, as well as to those which are more easy and pleasant[b]—

And will make us as solicitous to do what is right towards strangers or enemies, as towards our own friends or partizans[b]—]

2. To desires without reserve—

[Religion penetrates to the inmost soul, and regulates all our motives and principles of action—

The person whose *outward* conduct *only* is good, is in God's sight no other than a "whited sepulchre"—

The man whose heart is right with God, will watch against all selfish ends, and endeavour to act with a single eye to the glory of his God—]

INFER,

1. How unjustly is religion condemned in the world!

[Many

[b] 1 Tim. v. 21.

[Many consider religion as destructive of all personal and social happiness—

But what is there in this representation of religion that deserves such a character?—

Let the world call it *folly* if they will; but God accounts it "*wisdom*"—]

2. What reason have the most godly to blush and be ashamed!

[We must not estimate our religion by our opinions so much as by our practice—

Doubtless we must build on Christ as our only foundation; but we have no evidence of an union with him any further than we raise upon him this holy superstructure—

Alas! what poor builders have the very best of us been; and how little progress have we made when we judge by this test!—]

3. What need have we to wait continually upon our God in prayer!

[This wisdom is "from above," and can be derived from God alone—

And how can we obtain it of him, but in the exercise of prayer?—

Let us then ask it of him, who has promised to impart it "liberally, and without upbraiding[c]"—]

[c] Jam. i. 5.

MCXLIX.

THE FOLLY OF UNDUE SECURITY.

Jam. iv. 13, 14. *Go to now, ye that say, To-day, or to-morrow, we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow: for what is your life? it is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.*

RELIGION has ever a tendency to decline. Sin has pre-occupied the ground: and, though religion expels it for a time, it is ever watching, as it were, for an opportunity to return, and to regain its former ascendant over the soul. Even in the Apostolic age manifold declensions were found, not only in individuals, but in whole Churches: and St. James, with the utmost fidelity and earnestness, set himself to counteract the fatal evil. Amongst the various evils which

which he had to reprove, was that of undue security, or of presuming on the success of our plans for future advancement, without any becoming reference to the shortness and uncertainty of life: and there being still but too much reason to complain of this habit in the Christian world, I shall distinctly mark,

I. The habit which is here censured—

The Apostle does not intend to condemn all forethought and contrivance; for then we should all be as weak and foolish as children: nor indeed, if prospective plans were unlawful, would any one branch of agriculture, or commerce, or even of liberal education, be carried forward. It is the proud reliance on our own wisdom, and the confident expectation of time to come, that is here condemned; and this is,

1. A great evil—

[What is it but an entire forgetfulness of our dependence upon God? For who is it that can give success to any plans, but God himself? And, if we could command success, who can tell whether that which we seek as a blessing, may not prove to us the greatest curse? Even an unqualified desire of the things themselves, without a reference to the wisdom of God to choose for us, and his will to bestow them on us, is highly sinful. It contravenes that express command, "Thou shalt not covet," and is, in fact, an usurpation of God's prerogative to direct and govern the affairs of men. Besides, such a confident expectation of life is of itself most offensive to God: for it is "he who holdeth our souls in life:" "in him we live, and move, and have our being:" and the contemplation of life, irrespective of his agency, is no other than practical atheism.]

2. A common evil—

[We imbibe these atheistical sentiments from our earliest infancy. Scarcely any other ever meet our ears. Our very parents are constantly speaking to us of what is to be gained by us in future years in consequence of our own care and industry. As we grow up, we buoy up ourselves with the same unqualified hopes and expectations: from youth to manhood, and from manhood to old age, we still continue to speak of future events as depending on ourselves, rather than on God; and seldom, if ever, have any direct reference in our minds to the superintending and all-directing providence of God. Indeed, it is from hence that our exertions principally arise: and so gratifying to our minds is this corrupt habit, that

that our chief happiness in life arises from it: for it is a well-known fact, that the fond dreams of hope almost invariably exceed the pleasures of actual enjoyment.]

Such is the evil which the Apostle censured in the words before us: which, however, lead us yet further to consider,

II. The folly of it—

There is nothing in reality at our command, or under our controul. We cannot by any means secure,

1. The success of our labours—

[" We cannot tell what shall be on the morrow:" we cannot tell how soon circumstances may arise to make us view that as an evil, which we just before coveted as a good. The fact is, that there is scarcely a man living, who has not as much reason to bless God for the dispensations by which his desires have been thwarted, as for those by which they have been gratified. How foolish then is it to take the disposal of events out of God's hands, instead of committing it to him, whose wisdom cannot err, and whose power cannot be counteracted! We may, like Israel, cause him "in wrath to give us" the object of our inordinate desires, and constrain him to inflict upon us the judgment denounced against his disobedient people; "I will curse their blessings."]

2. The continuance of our lives—

["What is our life? it is a vapour that appeareth but a little time, and then vanisheth away." This is a truth which all acknowledge; and which, if duly considered, would abate the ardour of our earthly pursuits, and moderate our too sanguine expectations. Who has not seen persons in the bloom of youth, when promising themselves years of prosperity and joy, cut off suddenly, even as the flower of the grass, which in the morning looks gay and flourishing, and in the evening is cut down, dried up, and withered? Yes, a light, airy, unsubstantial vapour is but too just an image of life, which in its best estate is vanity, and in the twinkling of an eye may pass away for ever. Is it wise then to be either looking forward to future joys, or resting too confidently in joys possessed, when for ought that we know, the decree may have already gone forth, "This year," this month, this very day, "shalt thou die*?"]

Let

* Here any instances of hopes disappointed by sudden death may be referred to. Such was that most deplorable one of the Princess Charlotte of Wales.

Let us LEARN from this subject,

1. To have a direct reference to God in all things[b]—"

[God will govern all things, whether we acknowledge him or not: and, if we refer all to him, he will govern all things for our good. Not a hair of our head shall fall to the ground without his special permission.]

2. To be moderate in our anticipations of earthly bliss—

[What a lesson is taught us by the fate of him who said to his soul, "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; eat, drink, and be merry." The reply of God to him was, "Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee." The true way to avoid disappointment from earthly things is, to regard them as vanity and vexation of spirit, and to be contented with such a measure of them as God sees to be best for us.]

3. To bend all our attention to the concerns of eternity—

[These will never disappoint our hopes: we shall never seek eternal happiness in vain. Our desires in reference to them cannot be too large, nor our expectations from them too sanguine. Who, on coming to our blessed Saviour, was ever cast out? In what instance did the blood of Christ ever prove insufficient to justify, or his grace to save? As for life, the cutting short of that will not deprive us of any blessing which we have sought: on the contrary, it will bring us to the speedier possession of all good. We must indeed, in spiritual as well as carnal things, place our hope in God alone; because God alone can "give us either to will or to do;" and in the bestowment of his blessings he will consult only "his own will and pleasure:" but if we look stedfastly to him, and rely confidently on him alone, "we shall not be ashamed or confounded world without end."]

[b] ver. 15, 16.

MCL.

SINS OF OMISSION CONSIDERED.

Jam. iv. 17. *To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.*

THERE is not any thing of which men are more convinced, than the shortness and uncertainty of life: yet in the habit of their minds they live as if they were

were certain of many months and years to come. They form their plans and projects as if they were sure of living to see them executed. Of this the Apostle complains in the preceding context, because it altogether overlooks God in the government of the world, and is nothing less than practical atheism.

Having pointed out the evil of such an habit, the Apostle deduces from it this general position; that, as the person who in theory acknowledges the providence of God, and practically denies it, sins; so, whoever omits to do any other thing which he knows to be right, sins also.

It is my intention,

I. To confirm this truth—

Let us consider what such conduct manifests. It argues,

1. An insensibility in the conscience—

[God has given to every man a conscience, to be, as it were, his vice-gerent in the soul. It is designed by him to check us, when we are in danger of committing any evil, and to stimulate us continually to whatever is pleasing in his sight. But if, when we know what is good, we do it not, we shew that we have silenced the voice of conscience, or have rendered ourselves incapable of attending to its suggestions. And is this no sin? Is a sentinel who sleeps at his post, guilty of no crime, when through his unwatchfulness a camp or city is surprised? And is not a Minister, who, when he seeth the sword of God's vengeance uplifted to strike his people, neglects to warn them, justly chargeable with their blood[a]? Shall not guilt then attach to you, who lull your consciences asleep, and say to yourselves, "I shall have peace, notwithstanding I walk after the imagination of my own evil heart[b]?" The very Heathen were charged with guilt, because, "when from the works of creation they knew God, they glorified him not as God[c]:" depend upon it, therefore, that your neglect of known and acknowledged duties cannot but involve your souls also in much guilt.]

2. An indifference to the welfare of our own souls—

[It is by our works that we shall be judged in the last day. We are as servants that have talents committed to us: they who make a good improvement of them will have a proportionable

[a] Ezek. xxxiii. 6. [b] Deut. xxix. 19, 20. [c] Rom. i. 21.

portionable reward: but those who hide them in a napkin will be dealt with as wicked and unprofitable servants[d]. What then do you say, in fact, when you neglect an acknowledged duty? You say, in reality, 'I care not for my soul; I care not whether it is happy in a future world, or not: I know that by a diligent attention to all God's commands, I might advance its eternal interests: and I know that by inattention to his will I shall involve it in misery: but let me have present ease; let me be excused the trouble of doing what does not suit my taste and inclination: let me have the world with its pleasures and interests: and if through my love to present things I must lose my soul, be it so: I consent to "the exchange[e]:" "I will sell my birth-right for a mess of pottage[f]."' Tell me now, Is there nothing criminal in this? May not such persons be justly charged with "loving death, and wronging their own souls[g]?" Yes: whether a man do a thing of which he doubts the lawfulness, or neglect to do a thing of which he admits the necessity, he is equally "a sinner against his own soul:" for, as "whatsoever is not of faith, is sin[h]," so to know what is good and to neglect it, is sin also.]

3. A contempt of Amighty God—

[Whatever obedience a man may pay to all other commandments, if there be one which he knowingly violates, or wilfully neglects, he is a rebel against God, and a contemner of his Divine Majesty[i]. For the same authority that enjoins one, enjoins all: and if it be disregarded in one, it is in reality disregarded in all[k]: for it is impossible to have a due regard to it in *any* thing, if we have not a regard to it in *every* thing. And is it no sin to cast off the yoke of God, and to say, "As for the word that has been spoken to me in the name of the Lord, I will not hearken unto it[l]?" Our blessed Lord has told us what he will say to such persons in the last day: Bring hither those that were mine enemies, who would not that I should reign over them, and slay them before me." "Those who knew not their Lord's will," and sinned through ignorance, are chargeable with guilt, and will be visited with punishment; because they had the means of instruction, and did not diligently improve them: but if "the servant who knew not his Lord's will shall be beaten with few stripes, be assured, that the servant who knew his Lord's will and did it not, shall be beaten with many stripes[m]."]

Verily this is a solemn truth and deeply to be weighed by every Child of man. Let me therefore proceed,

II. To

[d] Luke xix. 15—27. [e] Matt. xvi. 26. [f] Heb. xii. 16.
[g] Prov. viii. 36. [h] Rom. xiv. 23. [i] Ps. x. 13. Luke x. 16.
[k] Jam. ii. 10, 11. [l] Jer. xliv. 16. [m] Luke xii. 47, 48.

II. To suggest some reflections arising out of it—

Who that duly considers it must not see,

1. What ground we all have for humiliation before God—

[I will suppose that we have never committed any enormous sin, and that in respect of *the letter* of the law we have been as blameless as ever Paul was previous to his conversion: still, are we not sinners? There has been no doubt on any of our minds whether we had occasion for the acknowledged duties of repentance, faith, and obedience: but have we diligently performed these duties? Have we from day to day humbled ourselves before God, and wept in dust and ashes? Have we laboured to find out all our past transgressions, to spread them before God with penitential sorrow, and to implore with all earnestness the remission of them? ——— Have we fled to the Lord Jesus Christ for refuge, as to the hope that is set before us? Have we pleaded before God the merit of his sacrifice, and sprinkled our souls with his all-atoning blood? Is this the daily habit of our minds; and the only source of peace to our souls? ——— And have we given up ourselves to God without reserve, to fulfil his every command, and to live altogether to his glory? Do we for this end study his blessed word with all diligence, that we may know his mind? and do we labour incessantly to "stand perfect and complete in all the will of God?" We have known these things to be right; but have we done them? Can we appeal to the heart-searching God, that this has been, and yet is, the daily tenor of our lives? Must we not rather acknowledge, that no one day of our lives has been so occupied with these duties as it ought to have been? Then we are sinners, "sinners before the Lord exceedingly[n]:" and, if we turn not to God in newness of life, we shall speedily become monuments of his wrath and fiery indignation.]

2. The folly of seeking salvation by any righteousness of our own—

[I will not only grant, as before, that we are free from any gross sins, but I will admit, that we have done a great deal that was good and praise-worthy. But how shall we get rid of this immense load of guilt which we have contracted by our wilful and habitual neglects? Our good deeds, admitting that we have performed some, have been only occasional: whereas our neglects have been continual, from the first moment that we began to be capable of acting. Our good deeds have all been marred with imperfections; but our neglects have had in

[n] Gen. xiii. 13.

in them no mixture of good: they were pure and unmixed evil; and in comparison of them, any good that we do is lighter than dust upon the balance. In truth, no man who reflected a moment on my text could any more entertain a hope of being justified by any righteousness of his own, than he could form a purpose to create a world. He would see, that, whilst he was doing those very works on which he was inclined to build his hopes, the weakness and defectiveness of his exertions infinitely outweighed any merit which they might be supposed to have; and rendered his works a just ground for condemnation, rather than of justification before God. Bear in mind then the declaration before us; and limit not your views to sins *of commission*, but extend them to sins *of omission*: and then you will no longer hesitate to renounce all hope in yourselves, but will say with the Apostle Paul, "I desire to be found in Christ, not having mine own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith[o]."]

3. The improvement which we should make of divine ordinances—

[We should not come to the House of God merely to satisfy conscience and to perform a duty, but really to get instruction respecting the mind and will of God. A mariner about to navigate a ship, and having the assistance of a skilful builder to examine whether she was in a state fit for sea, would not listen to his observations as a mere matter of curiosity or amusement, nor would he shut his eyes to any defects that were pointed out: his object would be, to find out defects, in order to their being remedied: and if only a doubt were suggested, he would endeavour to ascertain how far there was any foundation for it. He would say, I am about to commit my life and property to this vessel, and I must not stay till I am got into the midst of the ocean before I search into her state: it will be too late to do that when I am in the midst of a storm: I must do it now, before I go on board. Precisely in this way should you come up to the House of God. You are about to embark for eternity: and the instructions given by your Minister are intended to point out every defect in your vessel, in order to its being remedied in time. Shut not then your ears to his instructions; and close not your eyes to your defects: but bless God for every assistance which you can obtain in a matter of such infinite importance, and endeavour to improve it for the salvation of your soul. In particular, search out *your defects*; and cry mightily to God to pardon them for the Redeemer's sake, and to repair them by the influences of his

[o] Phil. iii. 9.

his good Spirit: so may you hope to navigate in safety this tempestuous ocean; and in due season to "have an abundant entrance" into the haven of eternal bliss.]

MCLI.

PATIENT PERSEVERANCE URGED.

Jam. v. 7, 8. *Be patient, Brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient: stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.*

CHRISTIANITY, even in the Apostolic age, was professed by multitudes who neither understood its doctrines nor obeyed its precepts. The great and fundamental doctrine of justification by faith was denied by some, and abused by others; who took occasion from it to "turn the grace of God into licentiousness," and to "continue in sin that grace might abound." To this latter class more especially St. James directed his epistle. He did indeed write to the unbelieving Jews also: for his epistle is addressed "To the twelve tribes who were scattered abroad:" and, as they were in no state to receive such affectionate salutations as are observable in the epistles which were addressed to Christians only, he contented himself with merely sending to them "greeting[a]." There were indeed many truly pious persons who were suffering for the truth sake; and these he sought to comfort and encourage. The foregoing part of this chapter seems addressed to the former: the text and following verses, to the latter. We cannot conceive that the oppressive and murderous conduct which he lays to the charge of some, could admit of their being numbered with the Church of God. But their cruelties rendered the path of the true Christians who were among them far more difficult: and therefore, after warning those who were so grossly violating every principle of common morality, he encourages the suffering Christians to persevere in

[a] Jam. i. 1.

in a patient discharge of their duty, and in an assured expectation of recompence at the coming of their Lord.

We shall consider the injunction which he gives them in a two-fold view;

I. In reference to the terms by which it is expressed—

These are strong and energetic. Twice he says, "Be patient;" that is, bear with all long-suffering the trials that are come upon you: and then he adds, "Stablish your hearts;" let them be so firmly fixed, that nothing may ever shake them.

Now from these expressions we gain a very considerable insight into Christianity: we see, that,

1. It exposes us to heavy trials—

[No man could profess Christianity at its first establishment, but at the peril of his life; thousands and myriads being called to seal the truth with their blood. If the same persecutions be not experienced at this day, let us not imagine that they have therefore ceased: for it is as true at this day as it was in the Apostolic age, that "all who will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." And every man now, as well as then, must be prepared to lay down his life for Christ, if he will be acknowledged as "a disciple indeed." Nor let it be thought that the persecutions of the present day are so very light. It is no easy thing for flesh and blood to withstand the hatred, and contempt and ridicule to which he will be assuredly exposed, if he set himself in earnest to serve the Lord. The fear of these consequences is abundantly sufficient to deter multitudes from embracing the Gospel, and to turn back multitudes after they have embraced it. True it is, that all are not exposed to these things in an equal degree: but every follower of Christ must have his cross to bear, and be conformed to his divine Master in sufferings, before he can be made like him in glory[b].]

2. It calls for great exertions—

[Religion is the same that it ever was, and calls for the same efforts on the part of all who embrace it. A race is not won at this day without exertion; nor does a wrestler overcome a strong antagonist without effort: nor a man engaged in warfare obtain a triumph without exertion. Our spiritual enemies are as strong as ever: sin is not subdued and mortified by

[b] Rom. viii. 17.

by listless endeavours; nor is Satan defeated without much watchfulness and prayer. The whole man must be engaged. We must summon to the conflict all our faculties and powers; yea, such are the efforts required, that, if we be not strengthened by that same almighty power which raised Jesus Christ from the dead, we can never prevail[c].]

3. It requires incessant efforts even to the end—

[There is to be no period when we are to give way either to impatience or sloth. However long our trials may continue, we are "in patience to possess our souls:" and however difficult the path of duty may be, we are "never to be weary in well-doing." God should be able to say of us, as he does of the Church of Ephesus, "Thou hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name-sake hast laboured, and not fainted[d]." This in particular is intimated in our text. It is supposed that the trials are long, and heavy, and calculated to turn us from the faith: and hence it is necessary that we "be long-suffering," and that our "souls be established with grace." It is in this way that we can finally prevail: for to those only who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, will eternal life be adjudged[e].]

To enter fully into the Apostle's exhortation, we must consider it,

II. In reference to the comparison with which it is illustrated—

This Apostle seems particularly to affect easy and familiar illustrations. The whole epistle abounds with them. He compares certain hearers of the word to persons beholding themselves in a glass, and then forgetting what manner of persons they were. Those who have a dead and unproductive faith he compares to persons who speak kind words to an indigent brother or sister without relieving their necessities. Those who govern not their tongue he reproves, by contrasting their conduct with horses that obey the bit; with ships that are turned by a helm; with beasts, birds, and even fishes of the sea, all of which have been tamed by men: and by warning them, that as no fountain can send forth sweet water and bitter, and no tree bear both olives and

[c] Eph. i. 19, 20. [d] Rev. ii. 3. [e] Rom. ii. 7.

and figs, so they can be no true Christians, whilst such unworthy and inconsistent speeches issue from their mouths. Here in our text he brings to our view the husbandman, whose continued labours and patient expectations form a fit model for the Christian. Him we are called to resemble,

1. In a steady prosecution of the appointed means—

[Many are the discouragements which the husbandman meets with in the cultivation of his ground. Sometimes the weather is untoward: sometimes blights, or insects, or mildew, injure his crops: sometimes drought almost destroys all his hopes: but still he goes on from year to year, ploughing his ground, clearing it from weeds, manuring it, casting in his seed, and harrowing it; and this he does, not knowing for certain that a single grain which he casts into the furrows shall rise again. But he expects nothing without the use of means; and therefore he does his part; and *that* too as regularly and diligently as if every thing depended on himself. He well knows that God alone can give rain, or cause the sun to shine, or give power to the seed which he has sown to spring up: but still he labours, that he may not fail through any neglect of his own.

Now in this he is a pattern for all Christians. They have their work to do. True, they cannot insure success: but they know that it is in *the use*, and *not in the neglect*, of the appointed means, that God will bless them: and therefore they are labouring as assiduously as as if every thing depended on themselves. Behold them in secret: they read the Scriptures with diligence: they pray over them with earnestness: they set themselves to mortify their evil propensities, and to fulfil their duties both to God and man. Observe them at all times, and you will see, that they are in earnest for heaven. When you go into the fields, and see the husbandman ploughing, manuring, sowing, harrowing, weeding his ground, you will never hesitate a moment to say, that he has the harvest in view. So, see the Christian from day to day, and you will without fail remark, that he has heaven in view, and that he is preparing for a future harvest.]

2. In a patient expectation of the desired end—

[Many months intervene between the seed-time and the harvest: but the husbandman waits with patience. It is some time before the seed springs up from under the clods: but he waits for it, and for "the former rain," which alone can call forth its vegetative powers. Its growth is afterwards impeded by

by drought: but still he waits for the latter rain, without which the corn can never come to maturity. There may be many alternations of hope and fear: but he commits the matter to the Lord, and waits the destined time, in expectation that God will give him to see, in an abundant increase, the fruit of his labours. So the Christian must wait upon his God: many things he will meet with to try his faith and patience: but he must commit them all to the Lord, not doubting but that God will give him "strength according to his day," and cause "all events to work together for his good." As the husbandman knows that a few months will bring the appointed harvest; so the Christian knows, that his Lord is quickly coming, and "will not tarry beyond the appointed time:" and for that time he must wait; fully assured, that the harvest which he shall then reap, will amply repay all his cares and all his toil.

This then, Christian, is the pattern you are to follow: you must be "stedfast, and immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord; and then you are assured, that your labour shall not be in vain in the Lord."]

LEARN then from hence,

1. How to estimate your true character—

[The Apostle addresses those whom he is exhorting by the endearing name of "Brethren:" for they are all children of one common Father, even of God himself. Now, whereinsoever they differ from each other, they all agree in this: the true child of God is engaged in a work, which demands, and in which he puts forth, all his energies. In it he is occupied throughout the year. He consults not the clouds, to know whether he shall plough and sow his ground: he knows that the work must be done, and he engages in it in a humble dependence on his God: and he looks to the future judgment, as the period when all his labours shall be compensated, and his hopes fulfilled. Now, I would ask, Would every one that sees you, know you by these marks? The husbandman, without intending to attract notice, discovers, to all, *his* views, *his* occupations, *his* desires. Are *yours* also in like manner apparent to all who behold your life and conversation? Doubtless your daily calls of duty are not so visible to every observer: but upon the whole, the great scope and end of your life is not a whit less visible to all who are round about you. Here then you may easily ascertain your own character. If eternity be not ever in your view; if all you do, have not a reference to it; if you be not willing both to do and suffer every thing that may conduce to your future welfare; and if you be not "looking for, and hasting unto, the coming of the day of Christ," as to the period for the completion of all your wishes,

you

you do not belong to this holy family: you may call yourselves Christians; but you are not Christians indeed. We read of those who "said that they were Jews, and did lie:" so you say that you are Christians; but your whole conduct gives the lie to your profession. If you are Christians in deed and in truth, "your works of faith, and labours of love, and patience of hope, are known to all;" and they vouch for you, that "you are the elect," the children of the living God[f].]

2. How to anticipate your certain end—

[All imagine that they are going to heaven; and will not be persuaded to the contrary. But, if you have ears to hear, and hearts to understand, you shall know this day whether you are going to heaven or to hell. Ask yonder husbandman: 'Have you been ploughing and sowing your ground this year?' 'No: I have had other things to do.'—'And do you expect a harvest?' 'Yes, I shall have as good a crop as any of my neighbours.'—'But do you think that you shall obtain the end without the means?' 'Tell me not about means and end: others give themselves a great deal of unnecessary trouble: and I shall have as good a crop as my neighbours: nor shall any one persuade me to the contrary.'

Now what, suppose you, will be the issue? Will the event accord with this man's expectations? Will he not, when the time of harvest comes, find that his confidence has been delusive; and that his barns are empty, whilst the granaries of others are filled with store? Then I agree that you shall be your own judges. If you can form a doubt about the issue of that man's confidence, especially when it is repeated for many years together, then I will be content that you shall buoy up yourselves with the hopes of heaven, though you never use any means to obtain it. But if you have no doubt about that man's folly, then see in it a just picture of your own.

Behold then, I declare to all of you, that the means must be used in order to the end. You must repent, "ploughing up your fallow ground," and "sowing in tears" of deep contrition. You must believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, as the only Saviour of sinners; and must look to him for "the former and the latter rain," whereby alone the seed of the word can live and grow in your souls. Lastly, you must make it the one labour of your life to prepare for his second coming, that you may give up your account to him with joy and not with grief. If you thus "go on your way weeping, bearing precious seed, you shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing your sheaves with you[g]:" but if you act not thus, know, that you shall reap according to what you sow. "He that soweth to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption: whilst he who soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting[h]."]

[f] 1 Thess. i. 3, 4. [g] Ps. cxxvi. 5, 6. [h] Gal. vi. 7, 8.

MCLII.

THE EFFICACY OF FERVENT PRAYER.

Jam. v. 16. *The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.*

PRAYER and intercession are generally considered as *duties:* but, if viewed aright, they would rather be regarded as *privileges:* seeing that they are the means of obtaining for ourselves and others those blessings which no created Being can bestow. In this point of view, the passage before us, together with the preceding context, affords us the greatest possible encouragement. It is to be regretted, however, that instead of making a due improvement of these gracious declarations, the Papists have made use of them chiefly, if not solely, to advance the temporal interests of their Clergy, at the expence of the eternal welfare of the Laity.

On the direction given to "pray over a sick person, and to anoint him with oil *in order to his recovery*[a]," they have founded an ordinance, to be observed when a man is absolutely *past recovery:* and that which was designed of God as *emblematic* only of *a miraculous power*, given *at that time* for the restoration of *bodily health*, they have established as the *essential* means *in all ages of saving the immortal soul.*

Again; Because the saints are encouraged to "confess their faults one to another," with a view to the augmenting of their mutual sympathy, and the directing of them in their mutual intercessions[b], these deceivers have required the Laity to confess their sins to the Clergy, in order to their obtaining of the forgiveness of them at the hands of God: whereas, according to St. James, there is no such deference due to any particular order of men; but the confession is as

[a] ver. 14, 15. The forgiveness of sin here mentioned refers only to the removal of any particular judgment that had been inflicted on account of sin. See John v. 14. & 1 Cor. xi. 30.

[b] ver. 16.

as much required from the Clergy to the Laity, as from the Laity to the Clergy.

We stop not however to notice these grievous errors, but pass on to that which more immediately concerns ourselves; and to point out to you,

I. The import of the assertion before us—

The preceding context certainly leads our thoughts *chiefly* to the work of intercession: yet since it is also said, "Is any afflicted, let him pray[c]," we must not confine our attention to prayer as offered for others, but must notice it also as offered for ourselves. We say then, that when "a righteous man" draws nigh to God, and presents before him prayers inspired and dictated by the Holy Ghost, (whose peculiar office it is to "help our infirmities" in prayer[d], and to "make intercession for us[e],") he shall prevail;

1. For others—

[Of this the instances are so numerous, that we can only give a short specimen of them: yet shall it be such a specimen, as will abundantly confirm the truth before us.

We will begin with Moses, who, when God was exceedingly wroth with his people for making and worshipping the golden calf, set himself to pray and intercede for them. But God, feeling, if I may so say, how impossible it would be for him to resist the importunity of his servant, said, "Let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them: and," if thou thinkest that my covenant with Abraham will be broken thereby, I assure thee it shall not; for "I will make of thee a great nation[f]." But Moses would not "let him alone," but pleaded for them with all imaginable earnestness and importunity: and the consequence was, "the Lord repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people[g]."

My next instance shall be that of Joshua, who, desiring to prosecute the advantage which he had gained over the Amorites, and destroy them utterly, prayed that neither the sun nor moon might advance in their course, but continue to aid him with their light, till he had accomplished his desire. To effect this, the whole universe must be arrested in its career; and such a shock be given to it, as to endanger its utter dissolution.

But

[c] ver. 13. [d] Rom. viii. 26. [e] ib. ver. 27.
[f] Exod. xxxii. 10. [g] ib. ver. 14.

But whatever stood in the way, it must yield to his prayer. Accordingly, no sooner did this righteous man issue the command, "Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon, and thou moon in the Valley of Ajalon," than all the laws of nature were suspended, and the sun stood still, and the moon stayed, till the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies. So the sun stood still in the midst of heaven, and hasted not to go down about a whole day. And there was no day like that before it, or after it, that the Lord so hearkened to the voice of a man[h]."

Here we have seen all the material creation stopped by the voice of prayer.—Now we will refer to another instance, wherein heaven itself is moved, and an angel sent from thence to fulfil the petitions of two chosen servants. Jerusalem was besieged, and utterly incapable of holding out against the enemy who was come against it. But Hezekiah and Isaiah betook themselves to prayer. And what was the result? An angel was sent from heaven to destroy, in one single night, 185,000 of the besieging army: and the blaspheming monarch, who had boasted that nothing could withstand him, was forced to return immediately to his own country, where he was slain by his own sons, whilst in the very act of worshipping the senseless idol in which he had trusted for success. For this cause, says the historian, "Hezekiah the king, and the prophet Isaiah the son of Amos, prayed and cried to heaven. And the Lord sent an angel, which cut off all the mighty men of valour, and the leaders and captains in the camp of the king of Assyria. So he returned with shame of face to his own land. And when he was come into the house of his god, they that came forth of his own bowels slew him there with the sword[i]."

One more instance I will mention, in order to shew how immediately the prayer of a righteous man succeeds. Daniel had understood, from the prophecies of Jeremiah, that the time for the close of the Babylonish captivity was near at hand: and he set himself to seek more particular instruction from God respecting it, in order that he might be able to take advantage of such circumstances as might occur for the benefit of his nation. "I set my face," says he, "unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes: and I prayed unto the Lord my God." And now behold the effect!—"And *whiles I was speaking and praying*, and confessing my sin, and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before the Lord my God for the holy mountain of my God; yea, *while I was speaking in prayer*, even the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision

[h] Josh. x. 12—14. [i] 2 Chron. xxxii. 20, 21.

vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, touched me about the time of the evening oblation, and informed me, and said, O Daniel, I am now come forth to give thee skill and understanding: *at the beginning of thy supplications the commandment came forth;* and I am come to shew thee all that thou didst ask[k]." See what expedition was used, by God's special command, to answer whilst in the very act of prayer; and to let him know, that, at the very commencement of his suit, his prayer was heard!

More on this subject is unnecessary: yet less could scarcely have been spoken, if we would in any degree do justice to it.]

2. For ourselves—

[I mention this last, because it is, in reality, the greatest: for the prayers which are offered in behalf of others, only prevail for the obtaining of some temporal blessing: they cannot procure for men the salvation of their souls: for, if they could, no creature would ever perish. When Stephen prayed, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge," it prevailed probably in behalf of Saul, and perhaps of some others: but it cannot be supposed that it succeeded in behalf of all. But for a man's own-self his prayer is sure to prevail. There is no limit to the benefits which he shall receive, provided only he ask according to the will of God. He may not be answered in the particular way that he may desire. The cup, for the removal of which the Lord Jesus Christ himself prayed, was not taken out of his hands; nor was the thorn for the extraction of which St. Paul cried with such eager importunity removed: but both he and his divine Master were answered in a way more consonant with the purposes of Jehovah. But in some way, and *that* the best, prayer shall most assuredly be answered to all who cry to God in sincerity and truth[l]. Whatever they ask in Christ's name, shall be given them[m]. Let them "open their mouth ever so wide, it shall be filled[n]." They may exhaust all the powers of language in their petitions, and may then extend their thoughts to the utmost limit of a finite conception; and they shall not only have all, but more than all, yea, "abundantly above all that they can ask or think[o]."]

The assertion in our text deserves the most attentive consideration on its own account; but more especially on account of,

II. The insight which it gives us into truths of the greatest importance—

From

[k] Dan. ix. 3, 4, 20—23. [l] Jer. xxix. 13.

[m] John xiv. 13, 14. & xv. 7. & xvi. 23. & 1 John iii. 22. & v. 14, 15.

[n] Psal. lxxxi. 10. [o] Eph. iii. 20.

From this we obtain an insight into,

1. The character of God—

[We think of God, for the most part, as a Being of infinite Majesty, who, unless in matters of very extraordinary moment, does not trouble himself with the concerns of men: and hence, if a person were to speak of having received answers to his prayers, he would be accounted wild, visionary, and presumptuous. But let God be viewed as he is represented in the text: let him be viewed as *noticing* with the deepest interest the very least and meanest of his children; as attending to their every cry, and treasuring up in his vials their every tear[p]. Not so much as a "breathing" of theirs escapes his notice; or a desire, of which they themselves perhaps are scarcely conscious[q]. The highest archangel does not more engage his attention, than does a poor despised Lazarus: nor is he less concerned about every individual amongst his people, than if there were but one in the whole universe. This is the true light in which to view his condescension and grace; of which a mother's feelings towards her first-born child afford but a slender and very inadequate idea[r].]

2. The Christian's state—

[In respect of external appearance, there is no difference between a Child of God and any other person: but in reality, as they are viewed by God, they are widely dissimilar. In the one God beholds his own image: in the other, the image of the wicked one. On the one he looks with pleasure and complacency: the other he views afar off, with utter disdain[s]. To the one his ears are open, to hear their every request[t]: "the sacrifices of the other are an abomination to him[u]." Look at Abraham when interceding for Sodom: there you see the friend of God. Look at those who, merely under the pressure of some calamity, cry and plead for help, whilst yet they have no love to God in their hearts: there you see the contrast; for God "laughs at their calamity, and mocks at their fear[x]." And all this is but a prelude to that which will speedily be accomplished in them; when the one shall be called to his right hand, and be exalted to a throne of glory; and the other be turned to his left hand, and be cast into the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone. Ungodly men endeavour to persuade themselves that all this is nothing but a vain conceit: but the Jews, notwithstanding all their blindness, could see that this difference did exist: "*We know*," say they, "that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and do his will, *him* he heareth[y]." Do ye then know it: for, whether ye will believe

[p] Ps. lvi. 8. [q] Ps. cxlv. 18, 19. Lam. iii. 56. [r] Isai. xlix. 15.
[s] Ps. cxxxviii. 6. [t] Ps. xxxiv. 15, 16. [u] Prov. xv. 8.
[x] Prov. i. 24—28. [y] John ix. 31.

lieve it, or not, so it is: nor are light and darkness, Christ and Belial, heaven and hell, further asunder, than are the children of God, and the children of the wicked one[z].]

3. The use and excellency of the Gospel—

[It is the Gospel alone that can bring a man into this happy state. Nothing else can shew him how to draw nigh to God with acceptance, or to obtain reconciliation with him. This exhibits to us a Saviour; a Saviour, who bought us with his blood. This brings us into union with that Saviour, so that we are made "one spirit with him[a]," and are entitled to a participation of all that he himself possesses; "of the love wherewith the Father loveth him[b];" of "the joy with which his soul is filled[c];" and "of the glory which the Father hath given to him[d]." Here is the true secret of the difference of which we have before spoken. The Believer is viewed as in Christ; as washed in his blood; as clothed in his righteousness; as altogether "one with him, even as the Father and Christ are one[e]." This accounts for all which we have before mentioned of the Believer's peculiar and exalted privileges. Let me then intreat you, Beloved, to embrace the Gospel without delay; seeing that through that alone you can have access to God, and obtain that fellowship with him which it is your privilege to enjoy.]

TO CONCLUDE—

[Bear in mind to whom these privileges belong: they belong exclusively to "the righteous man." The ungodly and the hypocrite have no part in them. Seek then to attain the character of the righteous: seek it by faith in the Lord Jesus; "by whose obedience you shall be made righteous[f]," and by whose all-powerful grace you shall "be renewed after the Divine image in righteousness and true holiness[g]." Then shall all these blessings be yours. You shall be "a people near unto God[h]:" yea, you shall "have power with God, and shall prevail[i]," in all your supplications, even for others you shall prevail to a great extent: but for yourselves you shall obtain all the blessings both of grace and glory.]

[z] 2 Cor. vi. 14—16. [a] 1 Cor. vi. 17. [b] John xvii. 23.
[c] John xvii. 13. [d] ib. ver. 22. [e] ib. ver. 21.
[f] Rev. v. 19. [g] Eph. iv. 24. [h] Ps. cxlviii. 14.
[i] Hos. xii. 4.

MCLIII.

CONVERSION OF A SINNER A GREAT BENEFIT.

Jam. v. 19, 20. *Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth,*

and one convert him, let him know, that he which converteth a sinner from the error of his way, shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.

IN the Apostolic age, the power of working miracles was vouchsafed to many; and was much coveted, not only on account of the benefit which it enabled its possessor to impart, but on account of the honour which it brought to him that exercised it. That power has long since been withdrawn, it being no longer necessary for the support and credit of the Christian cause. Nor need we regret its discontinuance; since there is yet communicated to every true Christian a power of infinitely greater value; namely, a power to instruct and save the souls of men. We cannot any longer by the prayer of faith save the sick, and raise him up from the bed of sickness, and remove the judgments that have been inflicted on him on account of his sins[a]: but by instructing a sinner, and turning him from the error of his sins, we can now, no less than in the Apostolic age, save a soul from death, and hide a multitude of sins. The miraculous power was in the hands of few, even of "the Elders of the Church;" but this spiritual power, as my text intimates, is common to all, and is to be exercised by all.

From hence we see,

I. Our duty towards our erring Brethren—

There are still, as formerly, many who, whilst they are called Christians, do materially "err from the truth"—

[No one can read this Epistle without seeing that very awful errors obtained in the Church, both in relation to faith and practice: and no one can know any thing of the Christian world, and not know, that Christianity amongst them is little more than a name. The very way of salvation, simple as it is, is very little understood. There is scarcely any one who is not expecting to be saved in whole, or in part, by some works of his own. The generality imagine that their repentance and reformation are to recommend them to God; and even those who acknowledge their obligations to the Lord Jesus Christ for what he has done and suffered for them, yet hope to obtain *an*

[a] ver. 14, 15.

an interest in Him by their good works, or *acceptance on account of their works* through him. The simple life of faith is but little known; and frequently but little experienced, even where in terms the necessity of it is acknowledged.

The same may be said of men's practice also. Look at the life and conduct of the whole Christian world, and say, What resemblance you see in it to the life of Christ. Christians are said to be "epistles of Christ, known and read of all men." But what more would you learn of the mind and will of Christ, from what you see in the Christian world, than from what you might find in the better sort of Heathens? In the Lord Jesus Christ there was an entire superiority to the world: but in his professed followers you see an entire subjection to it. In the Lord Jesus Christ you find that "it was his meat and drink to do the will of his heavenly Father:" but in his professed followers you will see no such effort, no such determination to serve and honour God. Let all of you, who are here present, look at *their own* principles, and *their own* practice, and see whether they are founded altogether upon God's revealed will, and altogether conformed to the pattern set before you in the Scriptures. The more candidly these matters be inquired into, the more clearly will you see, that the great mass of nominal Christians are "erring from the truth," and need to "be converted from the error of their ways."]

Towards these our duty is to use all possible means for their conversion—

[We are not all called to take upon us the Ministerial office: but we all in our respective circles should exert ourselves for the edification of those around us. No man is at liberty "to put his light under a bed, or under a bushel:" no man is at liberty to ask, "Am I my brother's keeper?" Would any man, who should see an house on fire, be justified in saying, 'It is no concern of mine?' or, if the inhabitants were burnt to death through his unconcern, would there be a creature upon earth that would not execrate him for his inhumanity? Much more therefore, if we see immortal souls "erring from the truth," and hastening to destruction, should we be inexcusable, if we neglected to warn them of their danger, and to shew them how their souls might be saved alive. We should warn those who are living in a wilful neglect of God: we should declare to them their guilt and danger: we should set before them what the Scriptures have spoken respecting "the death of the soul," and should intreat them to "flee from the wrath to come." In particular, we should, as far as our capacity admits of it, open to them "the truth as it is in Jesus." We should make known to them the wonders of Redeeming Love: we should set the Lord Jesus Christ before them in all his endearing qualities:

ties; and shew them how "able, and willing, he is to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by him." We should encourage them to believe in him; and, by the holy violence of argument and intreaty, should "compel them" to accept his gracious invitations, and to sit down as guests at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. In a word, we should do our utmost to enlighten, convert, and save their souls.]

That we may the more readily engage in this duty, let us consider,

II. Our encouragement to perform it—

We may doubtless find much of our labour to be in vain. But, if in any single instance we succeed,

1. We shall "save a soul from death"—

[Unconverted sinners, whatever they may imagine, are hastening to death: for the "wrath of God is revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men;" and the soul that sinneth, it shall die. And let not any one imagine, that this death consists in a mere annihilation: no; the soul, as to its existence, shall never die: but it will endure a misery of which we can form no conception, a torment in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone, which is called in Scripture "the second death." From this however, if we are made the happy instruments of converting a soul to God, we deliver it. What a wonderful thought is this! to deliver a soul from "everlasting burnings!" If we laboured throughout our whole lives, and succeeded but in one instance to accomplish our desire, how richly should we be recompensed! What if the great mass of those whose welfare we had sought, had derided us as weak enthusiasts? the thought of saving one soul from everlasting perdition would compensate all the obloquy that ever could be cast upon us. The truth is, we can form no idea what it must be to spend eternity in weeping and wailing and gnashing our teeth in the regions of despair, and under the wrath of an offended God. But, if we could form any conception of it, we should need no other inducement to labour day and night in endeavours to guide men into the way of truth, and to save their souls alive.]

2. We shall hide a multitude of sins—

[Who can ever count the sins of an unconverted soul? Yet shall they all be hidden, hidden from the sight of Almighty God, "out of the book of whose remembrance they shall be blotted," and from before whose face they shall pass away "as a morning cloud:" yea, God himself will "cast them behind his back into the very depths of the sea," and "will remember them against the sinner no more." Hear the declaration

ration of God upon this subject: "The iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found: for I will pardon them whom I reserve[b]."

Now consider this: consider an immortal soul laden with iniquities more numerous and weighty than the sands upon the sea-shore; and liberated from its burthen through your offices of love! Methinks, the most distant hope of conferring such a benefit is enough to turn you all into Heralds and Ambassadors of the Most High God. Yet let me not be misunderstood. It is not to the office of *public* instructors that I would call you;—for *that* should be undertaken by none but those who are called to it by God himself: but to the office of *private* instructors, I would invite you; and would urge you with all importunity to engage in it: for *it is not of Ministers that the Apostle speaks in my text, but of private Christians;* every one of whom he encourages to engage in this labour of love, saying, "LET HIM KNOW, whoever he be that converts a sinner from the error of his ways, LET HIM KNOW, that he saves a soul from death, and hides a multitude of sins."]

SEE then, Beloved,

1. What is the true end of the Ministry—

[The whole world is out of course: all are erring from the fold of Christ, and wandering like sheep that know not how or whither to return. That they may not irremediably perish, God has appointed Ministers, to go forth, as Under Shepherds, to search out the wandering sheep, and to bring them back to his fold. This is the one object of our lives; to shew you how far you "have erred from the truth;" to convert you from the error of your ways; and thus eventually to save your souls. In our execution of this office we perhaps appear to some to be uncharitable and harsh. But if we do believe that death, even the death of your immortal souls, will be the end of your wanderings, does it not become us "to lift up our voice like a trumpet, and to shew to the House of Israel their sins" with all fidelity? Suppose a person taking the soundings of a ship in full sail, were to find, on a sudden, that the ship were running upon rocks or shoals, and would speedily, if the helm were not instantly turned, be irremediably lost; would he not feel it his duty to apprise the pilot of his danger? or would the passengers, whose lives were in such imminent peril, be offended with him, if he spake as one who believed what he said, and as one who had the safety of the crew at heart? Methinks, if there were somewhat of vehemence in his words and manner, all would readily excuse it; and not excuse it only, but applaud it also, as the proper effect

[b] ver. 20.

effect of fidelity and love. Then consider us as placed in that situation by Almighty God. You are all embarked on board the vessel, and we are appointed by God to take the soundings: and we do declare unto you, that, unless your course be changed, you must inevitably and eternally perish. If you doubt it, take the line in your own hands, and examine the chart by which you are to steer. We do not wish you to take our word, but to see and judge for yourselves: and, if our testimony be true according to the written word, then be thankful for our labours; and, instead of being offended at our fidelity, adore your God, who has appointed us "to watch for your souls," and has connected our welfare with yours: for it is only by a faithful discharge of our duty to you that "we can save ourselves, or them that hear us[c]."]

2. What should be your view in attending on the ordinances of the Gospel—

[You should not come to be amused, but to be instructed and edified. You should come desirous of knowing wherein you have erred, and how you may get safely into the way of truth. Your minds should be open to conviction. You should be aware of the danger of self-deception. You should beg of God to instruct his Ministers how to speak most to your edification; and should intreat him to accompany the word with power from on high, and to render it effectual for the salvation of your souls. You should bear in mind, that, "though Paul should plant, and Apollos water, it is God alone that can give the increase;" and you should judge of your profiting, not by the pleasure with which you heard, but by the insight which you have gained into the evils of your own heart, and the ability that has been imparted to rectify your errors. As God in the appointment of ordinances seeks the conversion of your souls, so should you in attending on them; "receiving with meekness the engrafted word," and praying that, as it is able, so also it may be effectual, to save your souls alive[d].]

3. What should be the one object of your whole lives—

[What is there of any importance, compared with the salvation of the soul? I do not hesitate to say, that the care of the soul is the "one thing needful." If there were no future state, men might go on in their own ways without much concern. But, when there is an eternity awaiting us,—an eternity, either of happiness in heaven, or of misery in hell; when our destination to the one or other of these depends entirely on our conduct in this present life; and when no man knows that he

[c] 1 Tim. iv. 16. [d] Jam. i. 21.

he has another day to live; I see not how any doubt can exist in the mind of a rational Being, that the care of his soul should infinitely outweigh all the concerns of time and sense. True it is, that when men act according to this truth, they are derided as enthusiasts: but there is no man who, in his deliberate judgment, does not see, that "the fear of the Lord is the very beginning of wisdom." Regard not then the scoffs of foolish and ungodly men; all of whom, if not in this life, yet in the next at least, will applaud your wisdom. As for the angels, they, though in the very presence of their God, will not be so occupied with the glories of heaven, but they will have their joys augmented when they shall behold you turning into wisdom's ways. I pray you then to be in earnest about the salvation of your souls. If God has appointed an order of men on purpose to promote your welfare, and has suspended their salvation on their fidelity to you, and has taught them to consider success in one single instance as a rich recompence for the labour of their whole lives, surely it does not become you to be careless and indifferent. I pray you, awake to a sense of your condition: think how great a work you have to do, and how short and uncertain is the time wherein you have to do it: and now, ere it be too late, "turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O House of Israel?"]

MCLIV.

OFFICES OF THE HOLY TRINITY.

1 Pet. i. 1, 2. *Peter, an Apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: grace unto you, and peace be multiplied.*

CONTEMPTIBLE as Christians often appear in the eyes of men, they are of high estimation in the sight of God. Many glorious descriptions are given of them in the Inspired Volume: but in no part of it have we more exalted views of them than in the words before us; where, at the same time that they are represented as treated by man with all manner of cruelties and indignities, they are spoken of as most dear to every person in the Godhead, having been elected by God the Father, redeemed by the Lord

Lord Jesus, and sanctified by the operations of the Holy Ghost. This is a great mystery,—the Union of the Sacred Three in the redemption and salvation of fallen man. But the consideration of this mystery is of peculiar importance; not only as establishing the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, but as shewing the connexion of that doctrine with every part of our salvation; which originates with God the Father, is carried on by God the Son, and is perfected by God the Holy Ghost.

Let us, under a deep sense of our own ignorance, and with a humble dependence upon God for his guidance and direction, proceed to a calm, dispassionate, and candid consideration of this all-important subject.

I. The Father elects—

The doctrine of Election is here, as in many other passages, plainly asserted—

[Christians are "elect, according to the foreknowledge of God." By "the foreknowledge of God" I understand, God's infallible discernment of future things, how contingent soever they may appear to us. That he possesses this perfection is unquestionable: for if he did not, how could he ever have inspired his Prophets to foretell such distant and improbable events? It is not possible to read the life of our Lord, and to compare the predictions concerning him with the events by which they were fulfilled, and not to say, "Known unto God are all his works from the foundation of the world[a]." Indeed a man who denies this truth must "think God to be even such an one as himself," ignorant of the future, and made wiser by the occurrences of every succeeding day;—a supposition from which the mind revolts with utter abhorrence.

Considering then the foreknowledge of God as comprising every thing relating to the salvation of man, we are constrained to view all that relates to man's salvation as ordained of God. For though we may easily distinguish *in idea* between foreknowledge and fore-ordination, we cannot separate them *in fact:* since if God foreknow every thing, he foreknows it not as probable but as certain; and *therefore* certain, because it has been fore-ordained by him "before the foundation of the world," and is "wrought by him in time according to the counsel of his own will[b]."

Hence to God's electing love we refer all the grace and mercy

[a] Acts xv. 8. [b] Eph. i. 4, 11.

mercy that we have ever experienced; and thankfully acknowledge, that "by the grace of God we are what we are[c]:" and that, if ever we be saved at all, it will be, "not according to our works, but according to his purpose and grace which were given us in Christ Jesus before the world began[d]."]

The objections which are usually brought against this doctrine, by no means disprove its truth—

[Many affirm, that, *if the doctrine of Election be true, that of Reprobation, of absolute reprobation, must be true also.* In answer to this, I would say, that we know nothing, either of the one or of the other, but from the revelation which God has given us: and that, if that revelation affirm the one and deny the other, we must receive that which it affirms, and reject that which it denies. That it does deny the doctrine of absolute reprobation, I think is clear as the light itself. If when Almighty God swears by his own life and immortal perfections, That "he has no pleasure in the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn from his wickedness and live;" and then founds on that oath this gracious invitation, "Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O House of Israel[e]?" I am constrained to say, that the doctrine of absolute reprobation, that is, of God's forming any persons with an express determination to destroy them irrespectively of any works of theirs, cannot be true. But must I therefore deny the doctrine of election, which the whole Scriptures uniformly assert, merely because I know not how to reconcile the two opinions? Surely not. My sentiments are formed on *Scripture*, and *not on the fallible deductions of human reason:* and if *I* cannot reconcile the two, it is no reason that *God* cannot. *I* cannot reconcile the existence of sin with the holiness of God: but do I therefore deny, or doubt, either the one or the other? Certainly not; so neither do I doubt God's exercise of sovereign grace towards his elect, because my weak and fallible reason would be ready to connect with it an arbitrary decree against the non-elect. Sure I am, that the Judge of all the earth will do right; and that whilst all the saved will ascribe their salvation simply and solely to the grace of God, there will not be found one amongst those who perish, who will not confirm God's sentence of condemnation upon him, saying, "Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments[f]."

Another objection against this doctrine is, That *the elect will be saved, though they never should strive at all; and the non-elect will perish, however earnestly they may strive* But God has united the end with the means: and to attempt to separate them will be in vain. Who the elect are, we know

[c] 1 Cor. xv. 10. [d] 2 Tim. i. 9. [e] Ezek. xxxiii. 11. [f] Rev. xvi. 7.

know not, till they themselves discover it by the effects produced upon them: nor will it ever be known who the the non-elect are, till the day of judgment shall reveal it. But this we know,—and this we affirm for the comfort of all,—that "every one who asketh, receiveth; and every one that seeketh, findeth; and that to every one that knocketh, shall the gate of heaven be opened[g]." What can the most determined opposer of the doctrine of election *say* more than this, or *wish for* more than this?

Some will yet further urge, That, if this doctrine be true, *men may be saved without any regard to holiness*. This objection is of the same kind with the former: and that there is no just ground for it, our text itself sufficiently declares: for we are "elect unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ;"—elect, not to salvation only, but to obedience also;—to the one as the means, and to the other as the end.]

What is spoken respecting our being elect "to the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ," will lead me to shew, that whom the Father has elected,

II. Christ redeems—

On the subject of obedience being an end to which we are elect, we shall speak under the next head: at present, we confine ourselves to the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.

That the elect are sprinkled with the blood of Jesus Christ, is certain—

[Moses, when he confirmed the covenant which the Israelites entered into with their God, sprinkled both the altar and the people with the blood of the sacrifices[h]: and in like manner we, when we embrace the covenant of grace, are sprinkled with the blood of our Great Sacrifice, which purges us from the guilt of all our former sins, and sanctifies us as an holy people unto the Lord: "We come to the blood of sprinkling, which speaketh better things than the blood of Abel[i]."

And here it is particularly to be noticed, that it is not by *the shedding* of the Redeemer's blood that any are saved, but by *the application* of it to their souls. Millions "perish for whom Christ died[k]:" but no one ever perished, whose "heart had been sprinkled from an evil conscience," and "purged from dead works to serve the living God[l]."]

To this they are elected, as to the necessary means of their acceptance with God—

[None,

[g] Matt. vii. 7, 8. [h] Exod. xxiv. 6, 8. [i] Heb. xii. 24.
[k] 1 Cor. viii. 11. [l] Heb. ix. 14. & x. 22.

[None, however elect by God the Father, could come to God, unless a sacrifice were provided for them. All are sinners: all need pardon for their multiplied iniquities: no man could make satisfaction for his own sins. One sacrifice was provided of God for the whole world, even the sacrifice of God's only-begotten Son. Through that, God determined from all eternity to accept them: and in due time he reveals it to them, as the way opened for their access to him. Thus they are brought to see Christ, as "the way, the truth, and the life:" and thus they receive "redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of all their sins."

We must not however imagine that God elects any in a way inconsistent with his own honour. He does not by a mere absolute decree forgive them: he does not so overlook the honour of his own law, or disregard the demands of his own truth and justice. On the contrary, he provides for them a Saviour, through whose atoning blood they may be forgiven, and in whose obedience they may find a justifying righteousness. If he elected them simply to salvation without any regard to an atonement, he would exercise one attribute at the expense of all the rest: but in electing them to the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ, he provides for the honour of his broken law, and maintains in united and harmonious exercise the glory of all his perfections: he provides, that "Mercy and truth should meet together, and righteousness and peace should kiss each other[m]."]

As Christ redeems whom the Father has elected, so those, whom Christ has redeemed,

III. The Spirit sanctifies—

It is in reality through the influence of the Holy Ghost that the souls of the elect are sprinkled with the blood of Christ: because it is He who reveals Christ unto them, and enables them to believe on him. But, besides this, "The Spirit sanctifies them to obedience."—

To this are the elect chosen, as to the means whereby their ultimate salvation shall be attained—

[It would be dishonourable to God if an unholy creature were admitted to a participation of his throne: nor, if we could suppose such a creature admitted into heaven, could he be happy there; because he would want all the dispositions which were necessary to qualify him for the enjoyment of that holy place. On this account God has ordained to sanctify his elect in

body

body, soul, and spirit, and to "transform them into his own image in righteousness and true holiness."]

And this work he has committed to the Holy Spirit—

[The Spirit originally breathed upon the face of the waters, and reduced the chaotic mass to order and beauty. So does he move upon the Believer's soul. Whatever is corrupt, he mortifies; whatever is wanting, he supplies. Above all, he reveals the Saviour to the soul, and thereby changes the soul progressively into the Saviour's image[n]. This is precisely what St. Paul also has spoken in his Second Epistle to the Thessalonians: "We are bound to give thanks to God for you all, Brethren, Beloved, because God hath chosen you to salvation (there is the *end*) through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth." Here are the *means* to that end, even faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and his atoning blood; and the sanctifying operations of the Holy Spirit upon the soul [o].]

INFER,

1. Of what infinite value are the souls of men!

[Every one carries about him a treasure which God himself covets. The Father has given his only dear Son to redeem it: and Christ has shed his own blood to purchase it: and the Holy Ghost is ever striving with us, to make us surrender it up willingly to God — — — O that men would view their souls in this light, and bestow upon them the care which they so richly deserve! — — —]

2. What encouragement has every man to seek after salvation!

[The doctrines of election, of faith in Christ, and of the influences of the Holy Spirit, are supposed by many to create despondency. But, if duly considered, they afford the best possible antidote to despair. Suppose a person to be bowed down under a sense of his own guilt and weakness, is it no comfort to him to reflect, that the Father may elect whomsoever he will; that the blood of Christ is sufficient to cleanse from guilt even of the deepest dye; and that the Holy Spirit can renew and sanctify a soul, however inveterate its corruptions be? Let this then be the improvement made of these doctrines; and they will soon commend themselves by their cheering and transforming efficacy — — —]

[n] 2 Cor. iii. 18. [o] 2 Thess. ii. 13.

MCLV.

THE CHRISTIAN'S HAPPINESS.

1 Pet. i. 8, 9. *Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory; receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls.*

THE world often wonder that Christians do not conform to the vices of the age [a]—

And are yet more surprised that any should be willing to suffer for the sake of their religion—

But every Christian is actuated by a principle of love to Christ—

This principle even gathers strength from the opposition it meets with—

The Apostle is writing to those who were in heaviness through manifold temptations—

He declares, however, that their trials were promoting their eternal good—

He then shews that they were supported under them by their attachment to Christ—

In his words we may see,

I. The state of true Christians—

Christians cannot be distinguished better by any thing, than by their regard to their Divine Master:

1. They love Christ—

[Once, like the ungodly around them, they were enemies to Christ and his cross [b]—

They "saw no beauty in him, for which he is to be desired [c]"—

But now he is truly precious to their souls [d]—

They claim him as their best friend and portion [e]—

This is the character of every true Christian [f]—

If any answer not to this character, they are, and must be, accursed [g]—]

2. They rejoice in Christ—

[They have a good hope, if not a full assurance, of an interest in him—

They have access to him in their secret duties—

They

[a] 1 Pet. iv. 4. [b] Phil. iii. 19. [c] Isai. liii. 2.
[d] 1 Pet. ii. 7. [e] Cant. v. 16. [f] Eph. vi. 24.
[g] 1 Cor. xvi. 22.

They receive strengthening and refreshing communications from him—

They rejoice in him, as their faithful and almighty Friend[h]—

Their joy in him is "incapable of being fully declared[i]"—

It is a "glorified" joy, such as the saints in heaven possess[k]—

Every Christian indeed does not experience the same measure of joy; nor is any one at all times alike joyful—

But no one is a Christian, who does not esteem the light of the Redeemer's countenance above every other good[l]—]

That their felicity may be more generally experienced, we proceed to state,

II. The means by which they attain it—

Paul was favoured with a sight of Christ at the time of his conversion—

But this is not the way in which the Christian's state is attained—

[Many suppose, that if they could have a personal interview with Christ, they should love him, and rejoice in him—

But a sight of him with the bodily eyes only never produced this effect—

Many who even heard his discourses, and beheld his miracles, were amongst his bitterest enemies—

The Christians to whom St. Peter wrote had never seen Christ—

The Apostle *twice* mentions this circumstance, to shew that their regard for him did not arise from any personal acquaintance with him—]

Faith is the only mean whereby we are brought to this love and joy—

[It is only by faith that we can behold the excellency of Christ—

. . . . . that we can apply his merits to ourselves—

. . . . . that we can receive his gracious communications[m]—

Repentance will lead to this state; and obedience spring from it—

But it is faith only that will prevail to bring us into it[n]—]

To increase our ardour in pressing forward to this state, let us consider,

III. The blessedness of those who have attained it—

The

[h] Phil. iv. 4. [i] ἀνεκλαλήτῳ. [k] δεδοξασμένῃ.
[l] Ps. iv. 6. & lxxiii. 25. [m] Eph. iii. 17. [n] Rom. xv. 13.

The salvation of the soul is the great "end of our faith"—

[Present comforts are desirable; but eternal happiness is that which the Christian has principally in view—

It is to this that he looks forward, under his first convictions—

This is the end for which he cheerfully endures all his privations and conflicts—

In every possible state he has an eye to this, as the consummation of all his hopes and desires—]

This blessed object is already attained by all true Christians—

[They do not wait for it till they arrive in heaven—

Their full reward indeed is reserved for another world—

But Believers have the foretastes of heaven already communicated to them—

Yea, their love to Christ, and their joy in him, are an earnest, as well as pledge, of their eternal inheritance—]

INFER,

1. What a rational character is the Christian!

[He is thought an enthusiast, for loving and rejoicing in Christ—

And they who have no such love or joy appropriate to themselves the name of *rational* Christians—

But we are willing to meet our adversaries on this ground, and to submit our sentiments to this test—

If to admire supreme excellence, to love infinite amiableness, and to rejoice in unbounded goodness, be a *rational* employment; yea, if the glorified saints and angels be rational; then the Christian is a *rational* character; and the more so, in proportion as he loves and rejoices in Christ: and their adversaries are most *irrational*, in that they can love and rejoice in the things of time and sense, and yet feel no love to, nor any joy in, our adorable Lord and Saviour—

Let those who are now despised as enthusiasts, think who will be accounted *rational* in the day of judgment?]

2. How clearly may we know, whether we be real Christians, or not!

[There are certainly different degrees of faith, love, and joy—

But every true Christian experiences them in some measure—

This is decided by an authority that cannot be doubted°—

Let

° Phil. iii. 3.

Let us then examine what is the supreme object of our affections, and chief source of our joys—

Nor let us ever conclude well of our state, unless we can adopt from our hearts the language of St. Paul [p]—]

3. How highly should we value the ordinances of the Gospel!

[Faith, as has been shewn, is the mean of filling us with ardent love, and joy unspeakable—

And how is faith to be produced in our hearts, but by the preaching of the Gospel [q]?—

Let us then love the ordinances of religion, and diligently attend them—

Let us come to them *with the express view* to have our faith, our love, and our joy increased—

And let us judge of our improvement of them by the degree in which we experience these effects from them—]

[p] Phil. iii. 8. [q] Rom. x. 14.

MCLVI.

THE ANGELS INTERESTED ABOUT THE GOSPEL.

1 Pet. i. 12. *Which things the angels desire to look into.*

THE Gospel comes recommended to us by a great variety of most important considerations. It occupied the mind of God from all eternity. From the beginning of the world it has been revealed with gradually increasing light and evidence. When the period arrived for its full promulgation, it was opened by the Lord of life himself, and was spread with incredible effect by a few poor fishermen, whom he chose and qualified to proclaim it. The Holy Ghost also bore testimony to it by miracles unnumbered, that were wrought expressly in confirmation of it. But there is one circumstance, which is rarely adverted to, which yet should exceedingly endear the Gospel to us; namely, that the holy angels are greatly interested in it, and that they are daily studying to comprehend it. This is affirmed by St. Peter in the words before us: for the elucidation of which we shall point out,

I. The subjects of their inquiry—

The

The two preceding verses inform us, that the "salvation" of man, and "the grace that is brought unto us" for the securing of that salvation, are objects of their continual regard. More particularly they inquire into these things,

1. As foretold by Prophets—

[Every minute circumstance relative to the Gospel has been foretold by one or other of the Prophets; insomuch that, if we understood perfectly every part of the Prophetic Writings, we might extract from them as complete an account of the person, work, and offices of Christ, and of the establishment of his kingdom upon earth, as from the New Testament itself. But the Prophets did not know the full extent of their own prophecies. They knew that they spake by a Divine impulse; but the precise import of what they spake, they knew not. As the *wicked* Caiaphas, intending to stimulate the Jewish Council to put Jesus to death, delivered unwittingly a prophecy that Jesus should die for the whole world[a]; so the *pious* Prophets frequently delivered their sentiments in language, which was dictated by the Holy Ghost for the purpose of proclaiming mysteries which they themselves understood not. Hence they "inquired and searched diligently" into the meaning of their own prophecies[b]. The angels, in like manner, are desirous of investigating these deep subjects. To intimate the concern which they take in these things, there was a very striking emblem of it in the Jewish Temple. In the Holy of Holies was the ark: on that was placed the mercy-seat: and over that were two cherubims overshadowing it with their wings. The ark (in which the tables of the Law were kept) was a type of Christ, in whose heart the law was; and by whom it was fulfilled for us; and through whose obedience to it God exercises mercy towards us. This exhibited the substance of the Gospel. Now the cherubims were formed somewhat in an inclined posture, looking down upon the ark[c]: and this was ordered of God on purpose to denote the interest which angels take in this deep mystery, and the desire which they have to comprehend it: and it is to this very thing that St. Peter alludes in the words of our text[d].]

2. As executed by Christ—

["The sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow," were fully declared before he became incarnate. The angels therefore were prepared for that stupendous series of events

[a] John xi. 49—52.
[b] ver. 10, 11.
[c] Exod. xxv. 20.
[d] ἐπιθυμοῦσιν παρακύψαι.

events which in the fulness of time began to be accomplished: and, no doubt, they waited for them with devout and earnest expectation. Accordingly, the very instant that they saw him brought into the world, they carried the glad tidings to the shepherds, and informed them of the place of his nativity. From that moment, and especially in the most important scenes of his life, they watched him, not only as anxious spectators, but as agents employed by their Creator, to minister to his necessities, or to attest his triumphs. After his temptations in the wilderness, and his conflicts in the garden, they gladly interposed their friendly offices to comfort and support him. Though we are not expressly told that they were present at his crucifixion, we can have no doubt but that they attended on him at that awful period with more than ordinary solicitude. Were they capable of sorrow, methinks, their eyes would on that occasion be as a fountain of tears; and they would beat their breasts with grief and anguish. But with what joy did they roll away the stone from his sepulchre, in order that his re-animated body might arise[e]! How happy were they to satisfy the inquiring females respecting the truth of his resurrection, and the accomplishment of his own predictions! At his ascension, too, they comforted his astonished followers, by announcing to them his intended return in the clouds of heaven at the last day. Shall we say that in these things they were mere servants and messengers, who felt no interest in the events themselves? We know the contrary: for at his birth a whole multitude of the heavenly hosts burst forth into that rapturous hymn, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will towards men!"]

3. As enjoyed by the Church—

[It is not in a speculative view merely that they contemplate the great work of Redemption: they consider it as "the grace that is brought unto us:" and in that view their benevolent hearts are most deeply affected with it. Hence, as well as from a sense of duty to their God, arose that affectionate solicitude which they expressed on all the occasions above referred to. Wherever the glad tidings are carried, they hasten, to mark the effects produced by them: and if they behold a sinner impressed by them with humble penitence and contrition, not even the presence of their God, nor all the glory of heaven, will keep them from rejoicing on his account. They acquire, as it were, new joy from every triumph that the Redeemer gains, and from every benefit that man receives. From the moment of a sinner's return to God, they watch over him with the tenderest care. They encamp around him, and minister

[e] Matt. xxviii. 2—4.

minister unto him. Little do we think how much we are indebted to their friendly aid; from how many snares they deliver us; in how many conflicts they succour us; and with what transport they bear our triumphant spirits into the world of bliss. As once they waited with impatience to see the prophecies accomplished, and the work of Redemption executed in the person of Christ; so do they now wait with ardent desire to see the consummation of the Church's happiness, and the completion of the Redeemer's glory. And at that great and solemn day will whole myriads of them attend, to perform their last kind offices to God's elect; to assemble them in one collective body; and to unite with them in ascribing everlasting praises to God and to the Lamb. They cannot indeed say, "He has loved *us* and washed *us*;" but they will most heartily join in singing, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain."]

Their solicitude about things that relate to us, however strange it may appear at first sight, will not be thought strange, if we consider,

II. The reasons of it—

If we were unable to assign any reasons for their conduct, we might be well assured that their actions were regulated by wisdom and prudence.

But it is not difficult to account for their anxiety respecting these things: they look into them, not to gratify a vain curiosity, but,

1. Because of the glory of God displayed in them—

[The angels have been blessed with many bright discoveries of the Divine glory, both in the works of creation and of providence. But these have all been eclipsed by the brighter displays of it in the works of Redemption. Every thing in the universe bespeaks the wisdom, the power, and the goodness of God: and the punishment inflicted on the fallen angels declares his justice and holiness. But the plan of salvation revealed in the Gospel is represented as being eminently, and beyond all comparison, "the wisdom of God, and the power of God." Terrible as the justice of God appears in the miseries of the damned, it appears incomparably more tremendous in the sufferings of the Son of God, which were inflicted on him for our sins, and which were indispensably necessary to satisfy its inexorable demands. But what shall we say of mercy? There was not a single trace of that to be found

found in the whole universe. The angels, after seeing the judgments executed on the apostate spirits, could have no idea that mercy could be exercised towards the guilty. But in the Gospel it shines forth as with meridian splendor; and all the other perfections of the Deity unite and harmonize with it. Can we wonder then, that when they have a prospect of beholding "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ," they should look into that glass which reflects it? Can we wonder that they should examine with unwearied attention the prophecies that relate to Christ, the various incidents of his life and death, and the numberless benefits that he confers on all his followers? This alone were ample reason for all the care and diligence they can possibly exert.]

2. Because of the benefit accruing to themselves from the contemplation of them—

[Wise as those bright Intelligences are, we have no doubt but that *they are made wiser* by their progressive discoveries of the truth of God. The revealing of the Gospel unto man is one way which God has adopted for the further illumination of the heavenly hosts: he makes known his manifold wisdom to the Church, in order that by the Church it may be exhibited before the eyes of angels and archangels[f]. We have no reason to think that they have any revelations made to them, except through the medium of the Church: and consequently, if they would grow in knowledge, they must search, as it were, the Sacred Oracles, and "draw their water out of our wells of Salvation."

But by their contemplation of the Gospel *they are made happier* too, as well as wiser. For, in what does their happiness consist? Is it not derived principally from the knowledge of God, and their admiration of all his glorious perfections? But it has been before shewn, that their views of the Divine glory are rendered incomparably more clear and full by the representations given of it in the Gospel: consequently, their admiration of God must continually increase; and their delight in him be proportionably enlarged.]

INFER,

1. How unfounded is men's contempt of the Gospel!

[The Gospel ever has been despised by proud self-sufficient men, and ever will be, as long as such men continue upon earth. It will ever appear "foolishness to the natural man." It is still loaded with reproach, and stigmatized with oppro-

[f] Eph. iii. 10.

opprobrious names; and he must be "a stranger indeed in our Jerusalem," who has not known and witnessed this humiliating fact. But what do these scoffers think of themselves? Are they wiser or better than the angels? Do they imagine the angels so weak as to admire and search into things which are unworthy the notice of a sensible man? Alas! these proud despisers of God and of good men evince to the world, that they themselves are the greatest objects of pity and compassion. We do not, however, say to them as Paul did to the obstinate and obdurate Jews, "Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and *perish*[g];" but rather, Behold, and wonder, and *adore*.]

2. How criminal is their neglect of it!

[Though the angels are in some measure interested in the Gospel, yet their concern with it is not to be compared with ours. They would have been happy, though no Saviour had come into the world: but where should *we* have been? what would have become of *us?* Christ took not on him *their* nature: he shed not his blood for *them:* it was for *us* he became a man: for *us* he died upon the cross. What guilt then do we contract in slighting all his overtures of mercy! Surely the angels will rise up in judgment against us, and condemn us, if we are indifferent to the salvation he has so dearly purchased, and so freely offered.]

3. How great a blessing is it to be well instructed in it!

[We do not wish to depreciate human knowledge: but we do not hesitate to affirm, that all other knowledge, how deep, extensive, or valuable soever it may be, is no better than dung and dross in comparison of this[h]. All other knowledge shall vanish away; but this shall endure for ever. Angels would account all other things beneath their notice: but they never think they can pay too much attention to this. Know then, that if your eyes are opened to behold aright the great mystery of Redemption, you have the most valuable gift that God himself can bestow. You have that which will bring salvation to your soul. Yea, if you have but moderately clear views of the Gospel, you are in that respect greater and more highly-favoured than all the Prophets, not excepting even John himself; who was more than a Prophet, and had the distinguished honour of pointing out to men "the Lamb of God that should take away the sin of the world." Whatever then God has bestowed upon you, value this above all: whatever he has withheld from you, be satisfied with this. Whatever you do, or whatever you neglect, be sure to cultivate this.

[g] Acts xiii. 41. [h] Phil. iii. 8.

this. Resemble the angels in "looking into these things;" and you shall resemble them in holiness, and be with them in glory.]

MCLVII.

THE FATHER'S PART IN THE WORK OF REDEMPTION.

1 Pet. i. 20, 21. *Who verily was fore-ordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you, who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory, that your faith and hope might be in God.*

THE salvation of man is with great propriety ascribed to Christ, because he laid down his own life a ransom for us. But we shall have very imperfect views of this mystery, if we do not trace it up to God the Father, and see him concurring with Christ in every part, and performing, as it were, an appropriate office in the economy of Redemption. Indeed a distinct knowledge of the Father's work is highly conducive to our progress in the Divine life. This being intimated in the text, we shall endeavour to shew,

I. What part the Father bore in the work of Redemption—

He ordained his Son to his Mediatorial office from all eternity—

[As the Prophets frequently speak of the Messiah as sent and qualified for his office by the Father[a], so our Lord himself constantly acknowledged that he received his commission from him[b]. Nor was he first appointed when he became incarnate: he was fore-ordained before the foundation of the world. The time of his incarnation, the manner of his death, together with every the minutest circumstance relating to him, were fixed in the Divine counsels[c]. Hence he is called the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world[d].]

In due season he manifested his Son to the world—

[The Father prepared him a body in the Virgin's womb —and by a preternatural star conducted the Magi to him as soon as he was born—He afterwards bore testimony to him repeatedly

[a] Isai. xlii. 1.
[b] John viii. 28, 42.
[c] Acts ii. 23. & iv. 28.
[d] Rev. xiii. 8.

repeatedly by an audible voice from heaven, and by causing the Holy Ghost to light visibly upon him with the hovering motion of a dove—In all the miracles which he wrought, the Father bore witness of him[e]—even in the hour of his dissolution, when most of all his divine mission might seem doubtful, even then did the Father so testify of him, as to make the Centurion, who superintended the execution, exclaim, Truly this was the Son of God[f]!]

After suffering him to be put to death, he raised him up again from the dead—

[Jesus was able to raise himself, and is often said to have risen by his own power[g]. But we are expressly told here, and in many other places, that the Father also raised him[h]. Indeed, as the Father, to whose justice he paid the debt, gave, as it were, the commission, by virtue of which he was imprisoned in the grave, it was necessary that he should also give him his discharge, when the demands of justice were fully satisfied. Accordingly, his restoration to life is spoken of as the strongest evidence of his Messiahship, and of his having finished that work which the Father had given him to do[i].]

Lastly he exalted him to heaven, and invested him with all the glory thereof—

[Jesus, in his obedience, had looked to "the joy that was set before him;" and when that obedience was fulfilled, his Father gave him the promised reward. He placed that very person, who was crucified, at his own right-hand. He seated him upon his own eternal throne, and committed the government of the universe into his hands[k]. He has commanded all to honour HIM even as himself; and to all eternity shall that adorable Lamb of God be the medium of his people's happiness, as he has been the Author and Procurer of it.]

That this is not a matter of mere speculation will appear, if we inquire,

II. What effect the consideration of it is intended to produce upon us?

The ultimate end, for which the Father has thus interposed on our behalf, is, to glorify himself in the salvation of man. But there are other and more immediate ends, which the knowledge of his interference is intended to accomplish:

1. It

[e] John v. 36.
[f] Matt. xxvii. 54.
[g] John ii. 19. & x. 18.
[h] Acts ii. 32. iv. 10. & v. 30.
[i] Rom. i. 4.
[k] Phil. ii. 9—11

1. It should confirm our faith—

[We are called particularly to believe that Christ was the true Messiah; that he performed every thing that was necessary for our salvation; and that the Father is willing to be reconciled to all who come to him by Jesus. Now it is not possible to entertain a doubt of any one of these points, if we duly consider what the Father has done for us. Would God have so frequently, and in such a wonderful manner, borne witness to Jesus if he had been an impostor?———Would he have liberated him from the prison of the grave, and have exalted him to glory, if the work assigned him had been left unfinished———Would he have sent him into the world to redeem us, and have so gloriously rewarded his services, if, after all, he were not willing to accept returning Prodigals?———Can we suppose that God has done all these things only to mock, and to deceive us? Far be it from us to entertain the thought one moment. Let us rather conclude, that, as "it is impossible for God to lie," so it is most injurious to him to question one jot or tittle of the record which he has given us of his Son.]

2. It should enliven our hope—

[Many are the grounds upon which we are apt to indulge fear and despondency: but there is not one, which a due consideration of what God has done would not instantly remove. Do we suppose ourselves to have been *overlooked by God?* He gave his Son to be "a propitiation, not for our sins only, but also for the sins of the whole world;" and has asserted with an oath, that he is "not willing that *any* should perish, but that *all* should come to repentance and live." Do we imagine *ourselves to be too vile?* "It is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that he sent his Son to save *sinners*, even *the chief*." Do we fear lest, *notwithstanding we do believe, we should by some means or other be left to perish?* Behold he has exalted his Son as our *Head*, our *Representative*, our *Forerunner*, in whom we are already accepted, and with whom we shall assuredly be glorified in due season: yea, "he has made his Son to be Head over all things to his Church," in order that HE may put all his enemies under his feet, and secure the purchase of his own blood. Let us then yield no more to gloomy apprehensions, but ask of God the gift of his blessed Spirit, through whose powerful influence we shall both abound and rejoice in hope[1].]

ADDRESS,

1. Those who are in unbelief—

[None can be truly said to believe in God, who do not come

[1] Rom. xv. 13.

come to God "*by Christ*[m]." In vain do we profess the Christian faith, if we do not experience its influence in this leading point. How many then, even of those who give their assent to the Gospel as true and excellent, are yet Unbelievers in the sight of God! Let such remember, that they pour contempt upon the eternal counsels of the Father, and *practically* declare, either that the Divine Records are false, or that the wonders of redemption were unnecessary. Ah! what account will they give at the last, for *so* requiting the love of God! Let them blush at their ingratitude, and tremble lest, like their predecessors in iniquity, they be refused admittance into the Promised Land[n].]

2. Those who yield to doubts and fears—

[You have seen how great things God has done, in order that you might abound in faith and hope. Are ye not then enemies to your own peace, while you give way to unbelief? And do ye not deprive God of that glory, which, by an assured confidence in him, you might bring to his name? Do not imagine that it is any mark of humility to harbour doubts and fears. It is no humility to oppose his gracious designs. He would have you filled with consolation; but you, in yielding to unbelief and despondency, comply with the suggestions of Satan, and defeat, as much as in you lies, the gracious purposes of the Deity towards you. Seek then to be "strong in faith, giving glory to God." And in order to confirm your faith and hope, reflect often on the Father's love in giving you his Son, and in raising him triumphant to his throne of glory. In this you may read the termination of your conflicts, and anticipate the triumphs that shall never end.]

[m] See the text. [n] Heb. iii. 18, 19.

MCLVIII.

GROWTH IN GRACE IS TO BE DESIRED.

1 Pet. ii. 1—3. *Wherefore, laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, as new-born babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby; if so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious.*

A STRANGE opinion has obtained amongst some, that there is no such thing as growth in grace. But the whole tenor of Scripture, from one end of it to the other, proclaims the contrary. We will go no further than to the passage before us, and to the context

context connected with it. In the beginning of his epistle, the Apostle had spoken of Christians as "*begotten by God the Father* to a lively hope[a]." To stir them up to walk worthy of their high calling, he says to them, "Gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end, *as obedient children;* not fashioning yourselves according to your former lusts in your ignorance; but, as he who hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, Be ye holy, for I am holy[b]." This injunction he enforces by a great variety of arguments. He urges, first, the consideration, that God the Father will judge them according to their works[c]; then, that they have been redeemed by God the Son[d]; and then, that they have been born of God the Holy Ghost, through the instrumentality of the preached word, which unalterably inculcates and requires holiness[e]. From these premises he deduces the exhortation in our text: "*Wherefore, as new-born babes,* desire the sincere milk of the world, that ye may grow thereby; if so be ye have tasted, (or, as it should rather be translated, *since* ye have tasted,) that the Lord is gracious." Here the idea is kept up of their being Children of God, though children but newly born; and they are urged to desire and feed upon that blessed provision which God has made for them in his word, and which alone can secure their growth in the Divine life.

The words, thus viewed, will lead us to consider,

I. The character of God's Children—

Many are the descriptions given of them in the holy Scriptures; but there is not one in all the Inspired Volume more simple, or more accurate than this: "They have tasted that the Lord is gracious." This, I say, is,

1. Their universal experience—

[There is not a Child of God in the universe to whom this character does not belong. The very instant that a child is born of God, this is his experience. Indeed it is of "new-born

[a] Ch. i. 3. [b] ib. ver. 13—16. [c] ib. ver. 17.
[d] ib. ver. 18, 19. [e] ib. ver. 23—25.

born babes" that it is spoken. As to their knowledge of God, his nature, his perfections, his purposes, it may be extremely limited and imperfect. Even of the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, and of "the exceeding riches of God's grace as displayed in him," they may know but little: but they have "*tasted* that the Lord is gracious," and they do assuredly know it by their own happy experience. If the person be young or old, rich or poor, learned or unlearned, he has learned this, and knows it, and feels it in his inmost soul. He has heard of the Saviour; he has sought for mercy through him; and he has received into his soul a sense of God's pardoning love and mercy in Christ Jesus: and in this he does rejoice, yea, and will rejoice. He may indeed have received *but* a taste: but a taste he has received: and it is "sweeter to him than thousands of gold and silver." The most uncivilized savage, when born of God, is *in this* respect on a footing with the most enlightened philosopher: he has believed in Christ; and he "makes Christ all his salvation, and all his desire."]

2. Their exclusive distinction—

[Simple as this is, there is not a creature upon the face of the whole earth of whom it can with truth be predicated, but of one who has been "begotten of God," and "born again of the Holy Spirit." Others may be very wise and learned, and may be able to descant with accuracy upon all the deep things of God. They may in words and in profession greatly magnify the grace of God: but they have never had a taste of it in their own souls. And the reason is plain: they have never felt their undone state by nature: they have never been sensible of the immense load of guilt which they have contracted by their own actual transgressions. Consequently, they have never trembled for fear of God's wrath, nor with strong crying and tears sought deliverance from it through the atoning blood of Jesus. Hence the grace of God has never been extended to them; and consequently they have never "tasted that the Lord is gracious." They, as I have before said, may descant learnedly upon the subject of divine grace; but their discussions proceed from the head only, and not from the heart. As a man who has never tasted honey, however conversant he may be with its qualities, has no just conception of its flavour, so none but he who has experienced the grace of God in his soul can know really what it is. He knows it, because he has tasted it: and others know it not, because they have not tasted it.]

The Apostle addressing these declares to them,

II. Their

II. Their duty—

He teaches them,

1. What they are to put away, as injurious to their welfare—

[The unconverted man, though he may appear righteous before men, is in reality full of the most abominable evils. He may not indulge in any gross sins; but he is full of "*malice*," towards those who have injured him in any tender point; and would feel gratified, rather than pained, at any evil that should befal him. His whole converse with mankind, too, is for the most part little better than one continued system of "*guile and hypocrisy*," which are the two chief constituents of what is called politeness. If a rival surpass him in any thing on which his heart is set, and gain the honours which he panted for, he will soon find that the spirit which is in him lusteth to "envy." Moreover, whether he be more or less guarded in his general conversation, he will find in himself a propensity to "evil-speaking," as if he felt himself more elevated in proportion as others are depressed. Now these dispositions are more or less dominant in the natural man, as St. Paul has strongly and repeatedly declared[f] — — — and, after a person is converted to the faith of Christ, he needs to watch and pray against them with all imaginable care: for as inveterate disorders in the constitution will impede the growth and destroy the vigour of the body, so will these hateful dispositions "war against," and, if not subdued and mortified, prevail to the destruction of the soul. These things therefore must be "put away."]

2. What they must seek after, as conducive to their growth—

[As "the word is the incorruptible seed of which they are born[g]," so is it the food, upon which, as "new-born babes," they must subsist. In the Inspired Volume, they have truth without any mixture of error. The writings of men take partial views of things, and all more or less savour of human infirmity. Nor can the soul live upon them. If we have read a human composition two or three times, we are weary of it: but this is not the case with the word of God: *that* is ever new, and ever sweet to the taste of a regenerate soul. A little infant affects nothing so much as its mother's breast. From day to day it prefers that before every thing else that can be offered to it: and it thrives with that, better than with any food that human ingenuity can devise. So in the "sincere" and unadulterated "milk of the word," there is

[f] Eph. ii. 3. Tit. iii. 3. [g] Ch. i. 23.

is something more sweet and nutritious, than in all other books in the universe. In the Inspired Volume, God is presented to the soul under such endearing characters; the Lord Jesus Christ is set forth in such glorious views; the precepts, the promises, the threatenings, the examples, are all so harmoniously blended; in short, truths of every kind are conveyed to the mind with such simple majesty and commanding force, that they insinuate themselves into the whole frame of the soul, and nourish it in a way that no human composition can. This therefore we should desire, in order to our spiritual growth. We should read it, meditate upon it, delight ourselves in it: we should embrace every truth contained in it; its precepts, in order to a more entire conformity to them; its promises, in order to the encouragement of our souls in aspiring after the highest degrees of holiness. In short, we should get it blended with the whole frame and constitution of our souls, so that, to all who behold us from day to day, our growth and profiting may appear: nor should we be satisfied with any attainment, till we have arrived at "the full measure of the stature of Christ."]

Let me further IMPROVE this subject,

1. In a way of inquiry—

[I am not now about to inquire, Whether you have made a great proficiency in the Divine life, but Whether you have ever begun to live, or whether you are yet "dead in trespasses and sins?" In all the book of God, there is not a more simple, or more decisive test, than in the words before us. The extent of your knowledge or attainments is at present out of the question. The only point I wish to ascertain is this; "Have you been born again?" If you have not made any progress in the Divine life, are you "as new-born babes?" Have you been brought, as it were, into a new world? and are you living altogether in a new way? I do not ask whether, in "passing from death unto life," you have experienced any terrors of mind; or whether the change has been so sudden, that you can fix the time when it commenced? but this I ask, Whether you have attained such views of Jesus Christ, that he is become truly "precious to your souls[h]?" You cannot but know, that, however you may have been accustomed to call Christ your Saviour, you have not really found any delight in him in past times. But if you have been "born again of the Spirit," a change has taken place in this particular, and you have been made to feel your obligations to him, and to claim him as "the Friend, and the Beloved of your soul." I intreat you to examine carefully into this matter; for, if this change have not taken place within you, ye are yet in your sins. Oh, reflect

reflect on what our blessed Lord has so solemnly and so repeatedly affirmed; "Verily, verily, I say unto you, that except a man be born again, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God[i]." If you ask, What shall I do to attain this experience? I would say, Search out your sins, in order that you may know your need of Christ; and then go to him as the friend of sinners, who casts out none who come unto him. In a word, I would refer you to the words of our text, as contained in the 34th Psalm, from whence they are taken; "O taste and see that the Lord is good! Blessed is the man that trusteth in him[k]."]

2. In a way of affectionate exhortation—

[You have reason, I will suppose, to believe that you have been born again; and that, though of no great stature in the Divine life, you are new-born babes. If this be so, you have more reason to be thankful than if you were made possessors of the whole world: and I therefore call upon you to bless and magnify the Lord with your whole souls. But be not contented to continue in a state of infantine weakness, but seek to grow up into the stature of "young men, and fathers[l]." Some imagine that, as children, they may stand excused for the smallness of their attainments; but this is a grievous error. See with what severity St. Paul reproved the Corinthian converts for their want of progress in the Divine life. Their continuing babes in their attainments proved them to be yet carnal, instead of spiritual; and prevented his feeding them with stronger meat, that would have nourished and strengthened their souls[m]. See also how he condemned the same in the Hebrew converts, who by their infantine weakness were incapacitated for the reception of those sublime truths, which he would gladly have imparted to them[n]. Be afraid then of standing still in religion: for if you make not progress in it, you will speedily go backward; and if you decline from God's ways, O, how terrible will your state become! The Apostle tells us, that "if, after having *tasted* of the heavenly gift, and *tasted* of the good word of God and the powers of the world to come, you fall away, it is impossible for you ever to be renewed unto repentance, seeing that you will have crucified the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame[o]." Seek then to "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; and, by a constant attention to the suggestions in my text, so increase with the increase of God, that you may grow up into Christ in all things as your living Head, and finally attain the full measure of the stature of Christ."]

[i] John iii. 3, 5. [k] Ps. xxxiv. 8. [l] 1 John ii. 12, 13.
[m] 1 Cor. iii. 1—4. [n] Heb. v. 12, 14. [o] Heb. vi. 4—6.

MCLIX.

THE DIFFERENT STATES OF BELIEVERS AND UNBELIEVERS.

1 Pet. ii. 7—10. *Unto you therefore which believe, he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, and a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient; whereunto also they were appointed. But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God; which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.*

THERE is a great and manifest difference put between men in respect to the advantages they enjoy, and the endowments they possess. Some are born to great possessions, while others from their birth experience nothing but penury and want. Some are blessed with a strength of intellect, that qualifies them for the deepest researches; while others are so limited in their capacities, that they can scarcely comprehend the plainest and simplest things. A still greater difference obtains in respect to the opportunities which men have for spiritual instruction. As of old, the light of Divine truth was confined to one single nation; so, at this present moment, there is but a small part of the world who hear any thing of Christ, and a very small part indeed to whom the Gospel is preached in its purity. Such being unquestionably the dispensations of God's providence, we must not wonder if a similar exercise of sovereignty appear in the dispensations of his grace. To draw the precise limits, where human agency concurs with the operations of God's Spirit, or where it resists and frustrates them, is beyond our power: but of this we may be well assured,—that all evil is from man; all good from God. We shall have strong evidence of this in the passage before us; in which we see the difference that exists between different men;

I. In their regard for Christ—

Mankind

Mankind may be divided into two classes; Believers, and Unbelievers.

Now of all the things which may serve to distinguish these, there is none more decisive than their different regard to Christ.

To the Believer, Christ is "precious"—

[We need not enter into *all* the grounds of a Believer's love to Christ: suffice it to say, that he feels himself indebted to Christ for all his hopes in this life, and for all his prospects in the next. He has washed in the fountain of the Redeemer's blood, and has been cleansed by it from all sin: he has lived by faith on the Son of God, and has received out of his fulness all needful supplies of grace and peace. Hence he looks upon Christ, not merely as a friend and benefactor, but as a Saviour from death and hell. He esteems him, not only as precious, but as preciousness[a] itself. In comparison of him, all other things are considered as dung and dross[b].]

To the Unbeliever, Christ is "a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence"—

[Unbelief and disobedience are so nearly allied, that they are, in the Greek language, expressed by the same word[c]. Indeed unbelief is the highest act of disobedience; for "this is God's commandment, that we should believe on the name of his Son, Jesus Christ[d]."

To exercise faith on Christ is the duty of all. He is "the Stone which is laid in Zion," and on which we are to build all our hopes. But "the Builders themselves, the heads of the Jewish Church, rejected him:" and notwithstanding "he is become the Head of the corner," "the disobedient" still reject him. It was foretold that this would be the treatment shewn him by the generality[e]: and the event has fully justified the prediction. The grounds indeed on which men reject him, are altered; but their conduct towards him is the same as was observed in the days of old. The Jews were offended at his mean appearance, and his high pretensions; and particularly at his professing to supersede the Mosaic law: and, on these accounts, they crucified him as an impostor. We, on the contrary, profess to honour him as the true Messiah; but are offended at the salvation which he has revealed: we think it too humiliating in its doctrines, and too strict in its precepts: we cannot endure to give him *all* the glory of our salvation; nor can we submit to walk in those paths of holiness and self-denial which he has trodden before us. On these accounts many reject

[a] τιμὴ. [b] Phil. iii. 8.
[c] ἀπειθεία. Comp. Rom. xi. 32. with Eph. ii. 2.
[d] 1 John iii. 23. [e] Ps. cxviii. 22.

reject his Gospel: they cry out against it, as discouraging the practice of good works, as opening the very flood-gates of iniquity, and (strange as the contradiction is) making the way to heaven so strait and difficult that no one can walk in it. Thus, instead of building on Christ as the foundation-stone, they make him only "a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence[f]."]

How far this is to be traced to any antecedent purposes of God, will appear more distinctly, while we mark the difference between them,

II. In their states before God—

In the words of the text there is a double antithesis, which is rather obscured by the present translation, but which should be noticed in order to a clear understanding of the passage[g].

"*These* (the Unbelievers) stumble at the word, being disobedient"—

[In what manner they stumble at the word, has been already noticed. We must now endeavour to trace their stumbling to its proper causes.

It is certainly, in the first instance, owing to their own "disobedience." Men are filled with pride, and are unwilling to embrace any sentiment that tends to abase them. They are also full of worldly and carnal lusts, which they cannot endure to have mortified and subdued. In short, their prejudices and their passions are altogether adverse to the Gospel: so that, when the word is preached to them, they instantly set themselves against it. In vain are proofs adduced; in vain are motives urged; in vain are all human efforts to conciliate their regard to Christ: the language of their hearts is, "I have loved strangers, and after them will I go[h]." The contempt which the Pharisees poured on Christ, on account of his prohibiting the love of money, is traced by the Evangelists to this very source; "The Pharisees were covetous, and they derided him[i]." And our Lord expressly recommends obedience as the best preparative for receiving the knowledge of his Gospel; "If any man will do my will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God[k]."

But, according to the words of the text, it seems as if men's

[f] Isai. viii. 14.

[g] The words in italics, ver. 8. should be left out; and Οἱ be translated "*these*." The double antithesis will then be clear:—Ὑμῖν he is precious; ἀπειθοῦσι δὲ he is a stumbling-block. Οἱ, *these*, stumble *through their own depravity*; Ὑμεῖς δὲ enjoy your privileges as a *chosen* generation

[h] Luke xvi. 14. [i] John vii. 17.

men's unbelief was to be traced ultimately to the decrees of God respecting them. We cannot however understand them as establishing so awful a doctrine: nay, we cannot think that the doctrine of *absolute reprobation* can ever be established, while those words remain in the Bible, "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of a sinner[l]." Nevertheless we are not disposed to explain away the words of the text; for they certainly have a very awful and important meaning, to which it becomes us to attend: God has decreed, that they who will not receive the Gospel for the illumination of their minds, shall eventually be blinded by it; that they who are not softened by it, shall be hardened[m]; that they to whom it is not "a savour of life unto life, shall find it a savour of death unto death[n]." The Gospel is certainly so constituted, that it shall produce these effects. Christ is "set for the fall, as well as for the rising, of many in Israel[o]." "He is for a sanctuary," to protect and save the humble; but he is also "for a stone of stumbling," yea, "for a gin and a snare, that many (even all that are proud, perverse, and obstinate) may stumble and fall, and be broken, and be snared, and be taken[p]."]

. "But *ye*" (Believers) are exalted to the highest privileges by the Gospel—

[The various terms here used were originally intended to mark the privileges of the Jewish nation[q]: but they are applicable to Believers in a higher and more appropriate sense.

Believers are "a chosen generation:" they have been "chosen of God from before the foundation of the world[r]." Though the misery of Unbelievers is owing, not to any absolute decrees of reprobation, but to their own pride and wickedness, we must not imagine that the happiness of Believers is owing to their own inherent goodness: for they have no good qualities which they have not first received from God[s]; and consequently their good qualities are the effect, not the cause, of God's kindness to them. Though therefore we cannot accede to the doctrine of reprobation, we have no doubt whatever on the subject of election; since both by Scripture and experience it is established on the firmest grounds.

Believers are also "a royal priesthood:" they are now made both "kings and priests unto God[t]." They are chosen of God to reign over their own lusts, and to have the nearest access to him in all holy duties. There is no difference now between Jew and Gentile, or between male and female: but all

[l] Ezek. xxxiii. 11. [m] Isai. vi. 9, 10. [n] 2 Cor. ii. 16.
[o] Luke ii. 34. [p] Isai. viii. 14, 15. [q] Exod. xix. 6. Deut. vii. 6,
[r] Eph. i. 4. [s] 1 Cor. iv. 7. [t] Rev. i. 6.

all are permitted to approach unto the mercy-seat of their God, and to offer to him the spiritual sacrifices of prayer and praise.

Moreover, they are "a holy nation, and a peculiar people." All are united under the same king; all obey the same laws; all participate the same interests. They are all separated by God, and "set apart for himself:" they are not *of* the world, though they are *in* it: they are mere "pilgrims and sojourners" here; and are travelling to "a city which hath foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God."

All these distinctions they enjoy; and they owe them all to the sovereign grace of God.]

ADDRESS,

1. Unbelievers—

[You need only to examine your regard for Christ, and you will soon find with which class you are to be numbered. You may easily discover whether Christ be supremely precious to your souls, or whether you are averse to the doctrines and precepts of his Gospel.

Think with yourselves, what guilt you contract, and to what danger you are exposed, while you remain insensible to all the love of Christ: your guilt is greater than that of the very persons who crucified him, because you sin against greater light, and contradict your most solemn professions. O provoke not God to give you over to judicial blindness; nor make God's richest mercy an occasion of your more aggravated condemnation!]

2. Believers—

[You see in the latter part of the text how infinitely you are indebted to your God: once you were in darkness; now you are "brought into the marvellous light" of his Gospel: "once you were not the people of God; now you are: once you had not obtained mercy: now you have obtained mercy."

And for what end has God vouchsafed to make this alteration in your state, and to distinguish you thus from millions, who are still left in the very condition in which you so lately were? Was it not "that you should shew forth the praises, yea *the virtues*[n] too, of Him that called you?" Entertain then a becoming sense of your obligations: and endeavour to "render unto the Lord according to the benefits" conferred upon you. Shew forth *his praises* by frequent and devout acknowledgements; and shew forth *his virtues* by following his steps and obeying his commandments.]

[n] ἀρετὰς.

MCLX.

THE NATURE OF TRUE CONVERSION STATED.

1 Pet. ii. 25. *Ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls.*

NOTHING so reconciles the Christian to sufferings, or so quickens him to exertions, as a recollection of the mercies he has experienced at the Lord's hands. The Apostle is speaking here to servants, who were likely to meet with cruel and oppressive usage from their masters on account of their holy profession. To encourage them to a meek submission to their trials, he reminds them of the example which the Lord Jesus Christ had set them, when, for the redemption of their souls, he had endured all the agonies of crucifixion; and of the exceedingly rich mercy which they had experienced, in having been brought to the knowledge of Christ, and to the enjoyment of his salvation. "They were healed:" they were healed "through the stripes inflicted on their Divine Master;" who was now "the Shepherd and Overseer," as he had been the Redeemer and Saviour, of their souls. Enjoying then such benefits through the superabounding grace of Christ, they ought willingly and cheerfully to endure for him whatever, in his providence, he might permit to be inflicted on them.

This appears to be the scope of the passage before us: in discoursing upon which, I shall have occasion to consider,

I. Our state by nature—

All of us in our unconverted state have been "as sheep going astray." The prophet Isaiah, whose words the Apostle cites, declares this to have been the condition of all without exception: "*All* we like sheep have gone astray[a]." *In respect of folly*, we have resembled the silly sheep; which wanders it knows not whither, and exposes itself to dangers, from which, by continuing in the fold, it might have been

[a] Isai. liii. 6.

been exempt. *In respect of criminality*, our conduct justly subjects us to blame, from which the senseless animal is free: for our departure from God has been,

1. Wilful, without any just occasion—

[The mind of every unregenerate man is alienated from God: he hates his law: he is averse to his yoke: "he says to God, Depart from me; I desire not the knowledge of thy ways." All indeed do not choose the same path; but, as the Prophet says, they "go every one to his own way:" one in a way of open profaneness; another in a way of self-righteous formality: but in this all are agreed, that they listen not to the voice of the good Shepherd, nor walk in the footsteps of his flock ———

And now, I would ask, What reason have they for this? "Has God been a wilderness to them? a land of darkness? Wherefore have they said, We are lords: we will come no more unto thee[b]?" The true reason of our departure from him has been, that we have "not liked to retain him in our knowledge[c]:" on the contrary, the notices which we have had of his power and grace "we have imprisoned in unrighteousness[d]:" and actually "knowing that they who did such things were worthy of death, we have both done them, and had pleasure in those who did them," choosing them as our friends and daily companions[e].]

2. Habitual, without one serious effort to return to him—

[The sheep in its wandering state betrays to all its disquietude; and if it knew which way to go, it would gladly return to the fold that it has left. But the unconverted man goes farther and farther from his God, without so much as a desire to return: or if a desire occasionally arise in his mind, it is so weak and so transient, as to produce no permanent effect. If a sense of guilt and danger obtrude itself upon him, he strives to silence the conviction, and to divert the thought from his mind. If urged to return to the fold of Christ, he replies, "No: I have loved strangers: and after them will I go[f]." This is their way, from the first moment that they begin to act[g]: and in this they persist, till the good Shepherd, of his own grace and mercy, searches them out, and brings them back to his fold.]

Then takes place the change which is described in my text, and which leads me to set before you,

II. Our

[b] Jer. ii. 31. [c] Rom. i. 28. [d] ib. ver. 18. [e] [illegible] [f] Jer. xvii. 21.

II. Our state by grace—

"We return to the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls:" we return to the Lord Jesus Christ,

1. As our Owner—

[By grace we are taught, what in an unconverted state we little consider, that the Lord Jesus Christ is "that good Shepherd who has laid down his life for his sheep[h]." This thought, coming with power to the soul, has a constraining influence: it fills us with wonder and admiration at the love of Christ; and at the same time with grief, on account of our having forsaken such a Shepherd. Now we are perfectly amazed at our own ingratitude: and no terms are sufficiently strong whereby to express our self-lothing and self-abhorrence. Aware now that "we have been bought with a price," even with the precious blood of the Lord Jesus, we are convinced that "we are not our own," but his; and consequently, that we are bound to "glorify him with our body and our spirit, which are his." Under this conviction we return to him, and give ourselves up to him as "his purchased possession."]

2. As our Provider—

[When once Divine grace has begun to operate effectually on our hearts, we see how we have been all our days feeding on the husks of swine, whilst we deserted the pastures in which it was our privilege to feed. But no longer can we be satisfied with such things ——— Now we affect that better food, which the Lord Jesus Christ has provided for us; and desire to be led into those "pastures, where he maketh his flock to lie down at noon." Now we begin to understand what is meant by "eating the flesh of Christ and drinking his blood;" and we find "his flesh to be meat indeed, and his blood to be drink indeed;" and the promises, which we once despised, are "sweeter to us than honey or the honey-comb."]

3. As our Protector—

[Now we tremble at the thought of the dangers to which we have been exposed: nor can we rest without imploring the protection of our good Shepherd, to deliver us from that roaring lion that seeketh to devour us. No longer can we venture ourselves at a distance from him: we feel that we are unable in ourselves to cope with the feeblest enemy: and we "cast all our care on Him who careth for us."]

4. As our Governor—

[To hear the voice of our good Shepherd is now our delight. Wherever he calls, we follow. If we are erring in any thing,

[h] John x. 15.

thing, a word from him reclaims us. Wherever he calls, we go: whatever he forbids, we shun: whatever he commands, we do. The temptations which once allured us, have now in a great measure lost their power;—the terrors that alarmed us, their influence. What wilt *thou* have me to do? is now our one inquiry: and, having ascertained that, we are satisfied; nor can all the powers of earth and hell divert us from our purpose to obey his will.]

Such is the change which takes place in conversion. We say not that it is perfected in the first moment; nor that it is ever so perfect, but that it admits of increase. *In respect of parts*, a babe is perfect as a man; though every part admits of growth. So it is in the new man. All these things are found in him, though imperfect *as to their degree*. Contemplate then this change,

1. For the satisfying of your own minds—

[We cannot conceive of any figure better calculated to illustrate the conversion of a soul, than this. The state of a wandering sheep is known to all: the poor rustic that attends the sheep has as perfect an idea of its wants and dangers, as the most enlightened philosopher can have; and can apprehend as well the comparative felicity of those who are within the fold, watched over, and provided for, by a tender and faithful shepherd. Nor is there any difficulty in transferring these ideas to the state of a soul before, and after, its conversion. Consider then whether you are conscious of having experienced such a change? I will admit indeed that there are some who are sanctified, as it were, from the womb, and whose transition from a natural to a spiritual state is not so distinctly marked. But these are very few: and in them the image of a sheep obedient to its shepherd's voice, is as just, as in any other person whatever. The great mass of mankind have been far off from God; and they, when converted, are brought nigh unto him, as their Owner, their Provider, their Protector, their Governor, under all which characters they look unto him, and devote themselves to him, and expect every thing from him. I pray you, Brethren, see whether it be thus with you: for, if you are Christians indeed, "you were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls."]

2. For the inflaming of your gratitude to the Lord Jesus Christ—

[If you have been brought home to the fold of Christ, need I ask, whence this change arose? You will know full well

well that it did not originate with you, nor was carried into effect by any power of your own. The silly sheep would as soon return by its own wisdom to the fold it has deserted, as you would accomplish such a change in yourselves. It was the Lord Jesus Christ who sought you out, and apprehended you, and brought you home on his shoulders rejoicing: and if he had not effected it all for you and in you, you would have been roving from him to your latest hour, and would have perished in your sins. Be thankful to him then: adore him for the grace that has so distinguished you. And, whilst you give him glory for having so made you to differ from others and from your former selves, let his mercy constrain you to surrender up yourselves to him wholly, and without reserve.]

3. To excite your compassion towards a perishing world—

[Were you to see a straying sheep beset with dogs who were tearing it to pieces, who amongst you would not compassionate its wretched condition? Yet is this but a very faint image of the world around you; and not of the Heathen world only, but of Christians also. We see not indeed the fate prepared for them: we see not how they are already, as it were, in the jaws of the roaring lion, whose prey they will be to all eternity. But this is not the less true, because we do not see it. It is their real state; and soon shall we see it with our bodily eyes. Our blessed Lord, "when he saw the multitudes around him," (of persons nominally the Lord's people,) "he had compassion on them; because they were as sheep not having a shepherd." Do ye then consider the deplorable condition of all around you, and use all possible means to bring them to the fold of Christ——— And know for your comfort, that "he who shall convert a sinner from the error of his way, will save a soul from death, and hide a multitude of sins."]

MCLXI.

THE CHRISTIAN READY TO GIVE AN ACCOUNT OF HIS HOPE.

1 Pet. iii. 15. *Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.*

THE Christian's life must of necessity appear strange to those who know not the principles by which

which he is actuated. They see a friend or relative pause amidst the crowd of his associates, and retrace, in opposition to them, all the steps he has trodden throughout his whole life. Perhaps he was highly respected; and he now subjects himself to ridicule and contempt, from those who once held him in estimation. Perhaps he had fair prospects of advancement in the world, which now, by what are called his fanatical and over-righteous proceedings, he abandons. He once seemed happy in the enjoyment of all that the world could give him; and now he is turning his back upon it all, and following after phantoms of his own imagination. What can all this mean? Whence does it proceed? Is it the effect of a disturbed imagination? Is it from a desire after notoriety and distinction? or is it the fruit of deliberate hypocrisy? What has he seen, what has he found, that can account for such a change in his conduct?

Such questions will arise in the minds of many. Many indeed will not trouble themselves with making such inquiries. A shorter method with them is to revile and persecute, if by any means they may deter this supposed enthusiast from persisting in his folly: but others, who are more candid, will be glad of information, in order that they may be able to form some judgment about the proceedings which appear at first sight so unaccountable.

Now with respect to the former of these, the open persecutors, the Christian has nothing to do, but to commit his cause to God, and to go forward in humble dependence upon him: but with respect to the latter, he should gladly rise to the occasion, and "be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh him a reason of the hope that is in him with meekness and fear."

You will perceive that the principle by which the Christian is carried forward, is hope,—"a hope that is within him." What the Christian's hope is, will form the first point for our inquiry. His duty in relation to it shall then, in the next place, be set before you.

I. What

I. What is the hope by which the Christian is carried forward?

It is *a glorious* hope—

[It has respect to all that the soul of man can need, and to all that God himself can bestow. Contemplate man as a sinner, redeemed from sin and death through the blood of God's only dear Son, who at the same time has purchased for him all the glory and felicity of heaven. Hope fixes upon all these things as promised to the penitent and believing soul. Pardon and acceptance with a reconciled God; fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ, and a constant communication of grace and peace out of his fulness; the preserving and sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit; victory over death and hell; and an everlasting possession of heaven as a rightful inheritance;—all is apprehended by the believing Christian as his true and proper portion: by hope, he surveys it all, anticipates it all, enjoys it all. How wonderful! how surpassing all conception! Yet "to a lively hope of all these things is every Child of God begotten[a]."]

It is *a well-founded* hope—

[It may well be asked, What warrant has the Christian to indulge such an hope as this? Is it a mere conceit of his own, an expectation unauthorized and presumptuous? No: it is a hope founded upon the promise and oath of the immutable Jehovah. God has revealed a way of salvation, through the blood and righteousness of his only-begotten Son; and has promised to accept to mercy all who shall come to him in the name of Christ. To all such, without exception, he has engaged to give all the blessings both of grace and glory. And in resting on his engagements, the Believer cannot be deceived: for "God cannot lie,"—"cannot deny himself."

The Christian has a further ground of hope, in his own actual experience of these things: for in coming to God through Christ, he has found peace to his soul: he has received grace, whereby he is enabled to serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: and "through the hope that is in him he does actually purify himself, even as Christ is pure[b]."

Here then he stands as upon a rock, that defies the assaults whether of men or devils.]

It is a hope *that raises him up above all the things of time and sense*—

[In the prospect of all the blessings that are promised to him, how empty and insignificant do all earthly things appear! They are regarded by him as the dust upon the balance,

[a] 1 Pet. i. 3. [b] 1 John iii. 3.

balance, yea, as lighter than vanity itself. However important the concerns of this world may seem, they are but for a moment: whereas the objects of the Christian's hope are everlasting. Nor are the sufferings of this present world, how formidable soever in themselves, regarded by him as worthy of any consideration, in comparison of the glory which he sees revealed before his eyes, and which he expects shortly to inherit[c]. Here is the great secret of all his movements. Even in this life a man will exercise much labour and self-denial, in order to obtain some great advantage: What then will not a man both do and suffer, who has all the glory of heaven in view, and an assured prospect of attaining it, if only he "hold on his way," and "be not moved away from the hope of the Gospel?"]

Such being the Christian's hope, let us inquire,

II. What is his duty in relation to it?

The principle which operates so forcibly on the Christian's mind cannot be fully appreciated by one who is a stranger to it in his own soul: yet may it, by a judicious statement, be brought so far within the view of an unenlightened mind, as to carry conviction with it to the heart and conscience: and every one who professes it should be ready to afford to an inquirer all possible satisfaction respecting it: he should "be ready to give to every one a reason of the hope that is in him:"

1. With frankness and fidelity—

[It is here supposed that an inquiry is made respecting it: for otherwise it is by no means expedient that a Christian be bringing forward his own personal experience, and making that the subject of conversation. To do this is hateful. St. Paul, when forced by the accusations of his enemies to vindicate himself, and to declare the experience of his soul, again and again, with indignation as it were against himself, says, "I speak as a fool." And, where it is done without necessity, it is as strong a proof of a vain and weak mind as can well be conceived. But where a man asks us a reason of the hope that is in us, we should readily and cheerfully give him an answer. We should not be ashamed of our principles. We should never doubt whether they will bear us out, provided they be perspicuously and justly stated. We should candidly state, That we are sinners, deserving of God's wrath and indignation: that God has sent his only-begotten son to die for us: that through his precious blood we

[c] Rom. viii. 18.

we hope and believe that we have obtained the forgiveness of all our sins. We should then state our conviction, that sinners redeemed with so inestimable a price are bound to consecrate themselves to him, and, above all things, to seek the glory of his great name. We should further avow our full persuasion, that in the day of judgment we shall all be dealt with according to our works; that those who have suffered any thing to stand in competition with their duty to Christ, will assuredly be cast out as wicked and unprofitable servants; but that they who have loved, and served, and honoured him with their whole hearts, shall be applauded by him as good and faithful servants, and enter for ever into the joy of their Lord. We may then appeal to the most prejudiced mind, and ask, Whether, with such views and principles, it be not our bounden duty to act as we do?

This kind of statement should be made "*readily*," to *all without exception*, who desire to hear it, and are ready to attend to it. Whether they be more or less candid in their inquiries, we should account it a valuable opportunity to set before them the leading truths of Christianity; and we should avail ourselves of it, with a view at least to silence their objections, and, if it may please God, to convert and save their souls.]

2. With meekness and fear—

[There is, not unfrequently, found amongst the professors of religion a very unhallowed boldness and forwardness in declaring their sentiments. This is extremely indecorous, and odious in the eyes both of God and man. Though, as far as respects the truth itself, we should have no hesitation in declaring it, yet we should be much on our guard against any thing harsh or acrimonious in our manner of declaring it. Suavity and kindness become us on all occasions, and especially when speaking on the things of God. We must speak the truth indeed, whether it be palatable or not: but we must "speak the truth in love," and "instruct in meekness them that oppose themselves, if God peradventure may give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth, that so they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, by whom they have been taken captive at his will[d]." A Christian on such occasions must bear in mind how much the honour of God is involved in his conduct; and how much, humanly speaking, the salvation of others may depend on him. By an indiscreet mode of vindicating the truth, he may shut the ears, and harden the hearts of many; and so embitter their minds, as to make them determined haters and despisers of vital godliness: but by a meek, modest, affectionate, and prudent statement, he may remove their prejudices, and lead them to a candid

[d] 2 Tim. ii. 25, 26.

a candid examination of their own state before God. Hence then he should speak "with fear," even as the apostle Paul himself did at Corinth, where, as he himself tells us, "he was among them in weakness and fear and much trembling[e]." By thus combining meekness with fidelity, and fear with zeal, he may hope that he shall be the means of silencing opposers, and of winning many who would never have attended to the written or preached word[f].]

I would yet further enforce the exhortation in our text, with such ADVICE as naturally arises out of it:

Let it be the daily labour of your lives to be such as our text requires:

1. Be intelligent Christians—

[You ought to be able to "give to every inquirer a reason of the hope that is in you." It is a disgrace to a Christian not to possess such a measure of divine knowledge, as shall qualify him for this. It is not necessary that every Christian should be a disputant, and be able to enter into theological controversies: but every man should be able to answer this question, "Why are you a Christian?" Alas! The generality of Christians, so called, can assign no better reason for being a Christian, than a Turk can for being a Mahometan. But to all such I must say, You have yet to learn what a Scriptural hope is; and have only "the hope of an hypocrite, which will be swept away like a spider's web." I beseech you all then to study the Scriptures with all diligence; and to pray unto God, that you may be made wise by them unto everlasting salvation.]

2. Be stedfast Christians—

[You must expect that your faith and patience will be tried: but you must not give way to fear, or be diverted from your duty by any consideration whatever. There should be in you such an hope, as, like an anchor of the soul, shall keep you stedfast amidst all the storms and tempests with which you may be assailed[g]. By means of this divine principle you should be realizing all the glories of the eternal world; in the view of which, all earthly glories will sink into insignificance, and all earthly trials appear "light and momentary[h]." Survey then the inheritance to which you are begotten: take Pisgah views of the Promised Land: and then you shall be enabled to say respecting every thing that may occur, "None of these things move me; neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I may but finish my course with joy."]

3. Be humble Christians—

[Humility

[g] Heb. vi. 19. [h] 2 Cor. iv. 17, 18.

[Humility is the root and summit of Christian perfection. If men see you offended and irritated by the unkind usage which you experience, they will say, "Wherein are their principles superior to ours; or their conduct better than ours? They pretend to possess a hope that lifts up their souls in an extraordinary degree: but wherein does it shew itself? and what do they more than others? It is no uncommon thing for persons professing godliness to feel towards their revilers and persecutors the very same contempt and hatred which their persecutors manifest towards them. But this is a proof, that, whatever they may *profess* of love to Christ, they have never attained "the mind that was in Christ." If you would be Christians indeed, you must resemble Him "who was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and was dumb before his persecutors, even as a sheep before its shearers is dumb," and who in the very agonies of crucifixion prayed for his murderers. So must you: you must "shew all meekness towards all men," and be more fearful of dishonouring God, or of casting a stumbling-block before your enemies, by any thing hasty or ill-advised, than of suffering all that the most bitter persecutors can inflict upon you. Thus "letting patience have its perfect work, you will be perfect and entire, wanting nothing[i]."]

[i] James i. 4.

MCLXII.

A WORLDLY LIFE TO BE RELINQUISHED.

1 Pet. iv. 3. *The time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles.*

THE end of all God's dispensations towards his people is to promote their advancement in righteousness and true holiness. The Lord Jesus Christ himself "was made perfect through sufferings;" and the afflictions which his people suffer, from whatsoever quarter they arise, are intended "for their profit, to make them partakers of God's holiness." The Lord's people are "ordained to suffer," in conformity to their Divine Master: and their great concern should be, not so much to get rid of their trials, as to make a due improvement of them, by "ceasing from sin," and living more entirely to God, and for God. To this purpose the Apostle speaks in the verses before my

my text; and then adds, that the time past might well suffice to have lived after the manner of the Gentile world, whose ways it became them henceforth determinately to renounce.

From the words before us I shall take occasion to shew,

I. In what respects we also have wrought the will of the Gentiles—

The unconverted man, whether Jew or Gentile, is cast into the same mould, and, in the main, walks in the same paths. The nominal Christian also has the same views, the same desires, the same pursuits. In some external matters he may differ from the Heathen: but in the most essential parts of his conduct he accords with them. He resembles them,

1. In an utter disregard of God—

[The Heathen, of course, cannot regard God, because they know him not, nor are at all acquainted with his will. The nominal Christian has in some little degree the knowledge of his will; but he regards it no more than if he were utterly unacquainted with it. "He professes to know God; but in works he denies him."

On this subject let me appeal to yourselves. It is, I confess, a heavy charge, to say that you have hitherto "lived like Heathens." But I would put it to your own consciences, and ask, *What regard have you shewn for God's authority?* and, *What desire have you manifested to obtain his favour?* You have had in your very hands the means of knowing his will: you profess to believe that the Scriptures have been given you by him, on purpose to instruct you in the knowledge of him. Have you been thankful for this revelation of his will? Have you studied it with care, for the express purpose of learning how you might please and serve him acceptably? Have you turned away from every thing which his word forbids? Have you followed after every thing which his word enjoins? Have you embraced the whole of it as an infallible record, believing all that it reveals, and expecting with hope and fear the accomplishment of all his promises and all his threats? Have you, in short, "trembled at his word," as it became you to do? I must further ask, Have you humbled yourselves before him for all your past transgressions? Have you fled for refuge to the hope set before you? Have you washed your souls daily in the blood of the Lamb, even in that fountain which was opened for sin and for uncleanness? Have you cried mightily to God for the

the gift of his Holy Spirit to sanctify you, and to transform you into the Divine image? Have you surrendered up your souls to God as living sacrifices, and accounted an entire dedication of yourselves to him your reasonable service? If you have not done this, wherein have you differed from the Heathen; except indeed, that you have sinned against greater light and knowledge than they, and therefore involved yourselves in deeper guilt and heavier condemnation?]

2. In a determined prosecution of your own will—

[The character given of the Gentiles is, that "they lived to the lusts of men, and not to the will of God[a]." And what have you done? By what standard have you regulated your conduct? and whose will have you consulted? A decent Heathen regulates himself according to the standard which the society in which he lives has established. Whatever they approve, he follows: and whatever would degrade him in their estimation, he avoids. And has it not been thus with you also? In whatever line of life you move, have you not conformed to the habits of your associates, accounting every thing innocent which they deemed innocent; and satisfied with yourselves, if you only satisfied them? Amongst the particular habits of the Gentiles, the Apostle enumerates "lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries:" and do not these characterize the Christian world also? If we are free from open idolatry, we are guilty of it in our hearts as much as the Heathen themselves: for whilst some "make a god of their belly," and others are addicted to "covetousness, which is idolatry," we all, in one way or other, "love and serve the creature more than the Creator, who is over all, blessed for ever." As to all the other evils, it will be well if we have not been guilty even in the outward act: for "lasciviousness and excess of wine" are not such uncommon evils amongst us; but, granting that we have been free as it respects *the act*, have we abhorred the very thought of such evils, as we ought? Have we not, on the contrary, found pleasure in "revellings and banquetings," and "SUCH LIKE," without ever thinking that "they who do such things cannot inherit the kingdom of God[b]?" Is it not a notorious fact, that this season of the year, which ought to be in a more especial manner consecrated to holy duties, is devoted to "revelling and banqueting;" precisely as if the Lord Jesus Christ had come unto the world, not to deliver us from sin, but to give us a licence to sin[c]? But, whether we have indulged in these things

[a] ver. 2.

[b] Compare the words following the text with Gal. v. 19—21.

[c] It would be well if those who speak of *a merry Christmas*, would inquire what is meant by "*revellings, and such like.*"

things or not, still the same charge must be re-iterated against us; namely, that we have lived to ourselves, and not to God; and have made our own inclinations the rule of our conduct, instead of adhering to his commands. This is "the course of this world;" this is the line of conduct which characterizes without exception "the children of disobedience," and the vassals of the wicked one[d].

Say now, Brethren, whether ye have not "wrought the will of the Gentiles;" or, in other words, whether ye have not lived like "atheists" and Heathens[e]?]

Let me then proceed to shew you,

II. That the time past may well suffice for such a course as that—

Let me put it to yourselves:

1. What benefit have you derived from this course hitherto?

[Have you found that the gratifications you have enjoyed have afforded you any solid satisfaction? You "have sown vanity; and what but vanity has been your recompence[f]?" St. Paul puts the question to us; "What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed[g]?" Has not the creature proved, what God forewarned you it would prove, "a broken cistern, that could hold no water?" You are come, I will suppose, to a season of great trouble, or perhaps of sickness and approaching dissolution. Now what consolation have you from all that ever you enjoyed? Can the remembrance of it comfort you? Can it assuage your pains, or administer support under them? Can it pacify a guilty conscience, or take away the sting of death? Can it gild your last scenes, and brighten your prospects in the eternal world? Alas! alas! have you not "spent your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not[h]?" I will even suppose that you have possessed all that Solomon himself possessed, and revelled like him in every species of indulgence: What do you now find it all to be, but "vanity and vexation of spirit?" Is it not "high time, then, that you awake" from your delusions[i]? After having so long "fed upon ashes, and been turned aside by a deceived heart," is it not high time that you at last see, that "you have had nothing but a lie in your right hand[k]?"]

2. What benefit do you expect to derive from it hereafter?

[If

[d] Eph. ii. 2, 3. [e] ἄθεοι ἐν κόσμῳ, ib. 12. [f] Job. xv. 31.
[g] Rom. vi. 21. [h] Isai. lv. 2. [i] Rom. xiii. 11.
[k] Isai. xliv. 20.

[If you follow your sinful course ever so long, do you expect that it will be productive of any more happiness than it has already been? Will the creature change? or the condition of man change? Or will God so change the whole course of nature, that you shall find in earthly things what is to be found in him alone? But, if such changes are not to be expected, what will be the issue of such a course at the tribunal of your God? Had you been Gentiles, it may be expected, if I may so speak, that you had lived like Gentiles; or at all events, you would then "be judged by such a law as you yourselves had lived under[1]." But you were Christians; and had the law of God in your hands; yea, and the Gospel of Christ too: and therefore you shall be judged by the law, and by the Gospel, which you have so neglected and despised. I would that Christians would place themselves as at the bar of judgment; and bethink themselves, what will be their view of their present courses *then?* Will a life of carnal ease and indulgence, together with a neglect of God and of our eternal interests, be found so venial *then?* To have professed ourselves Christians, and have lived like Heathens, will *this* appear so light a matter, as it is judged now to be? No verily: things will then be seen in their true colours; and the care of the soul will then appear to be, what it really is, "*the one thing needful.*"]

APPLICATION—

[If now you are not convinced that the time past is sufficient for such a course, I beg leave to ask, What time you will think sufficient? I presume you will not say, that *the whole* life is to be spent in such a way: I conceive that no one is so blind, but that he will acknowledge that God ought to be served at some time or other; and that, at some time or other, the concerns of the soul ought to occupy the mind. Even those who die by the hands of the public executioner confess, that some preparation is desirable for them, before they enter into the presence of their God. What time then will you agree to be sufficient to work the will of the Gentiles; and when will you account it reasonable to begin to fulfil the will of God? Will you say, Twenty years hence; or, Forty years hence? Such a period as that may surely be acknowledged latitude enough, even for the youngest amongst us. But, if you will go to those who have served the world and their own lusts for twenty or forty years, you will not find them at all more ready to turn to God, than they were the first moment that they entered on that course. On the contrary, the longer they have lived in sin, the more rooted are their lusts, and the more inveterate their habits: their consciences,

[1] Rom. ii. 14.

sciences, too, are the more seared and hardened; and the more averse are they to be instructed in the way of righteousness. Besides, are we sure that so many years shall be added to our lives; or that, if they be, we shall be at all more disposed to serve God then, than we are at present? Are we sure that the Spirit of God, to whom we "do despite," will not at last depart from us, and give us up to final impenitence?

Beloved Brethren, be persuaded,—whatever be your age, be persuaded, I say,—that the time past is abundantly sufficient for the course which you have followed. And now, without any further delay, begin to "work the works of God." Do you ask, "What is the work of God?" I answer, as our blessed Lord did, "This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom he hath sent[m]." This is indeed the one great concern to which we should all attend. We are sinners, obnoxious to God's wrath and eternal condemnation. But Jesus Christ is a Saviour: he is sent into the world on purpose to seek and save that which was lost. Do ye then go to him; believe in him; implore mercy through him; cast yourselves upon him; and "cleave to him with full purpose of heart." Let the time which you have spent in the neglect of him be redeemed; and your efforts be the more urgent, in proportion to the time which you have lost. As for the baptized Heathens with whom you have associated, "come out from among them[n]," and "no longer conform yourselves to their evil ways[o]." They will, as the Apostle tells you, "think it strange that you continue not to run with them to the same excess of riot as you formerly did; and will speak evil of you on account of it[p]:" but be it so: if this be an occasion of grief to you, it should not be on your own account, but on theirs; for "they shall surely give an account to Him that is ready to judge both the quick and dead[q];" and "their hard ungodly speeches, which they have spoken against you" for His sake, will be visited upon them to their everlasting confusion[r]. Mind you yourselves: seek the salvation of your own souls, whether others will attend to their souls or not. Do not ye perish in Sodom, because your relatives mock at your fear of God's judgments[s]: neither linger in the plain, lest the storms of God's vengeance overtake you: but be in earnest: and "whatsoever your hand findeth to do, do it with all your might[t]."]

[m] John vi. 28, 29.
[n] 1 Cor. vi. 17.
[o] Rom. xii. 2.
[p] ver. 4.
[q] ver. 5.
[r] Jude, ver. 14, 15.
[s] Gen. xix. 14.
[t] Eccl. ix. 10.

MCLXIII.

NEARNESS TO DEATH A MOTIVE TO WATCHFULNESS.

1 Pet. iv. 7. *The end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer.*

THE office of the Gospel is, not to fill the mind with notions, but to renew the heart, and sanctify the life. It is true indeed, that the smallest conformity to its precepts will cause us to be loaded with obloquy and derision by an ungodly world[a]: but it furnishes us with very sufficient motives to disregard the censures of men, and to devote ourselves unreservedly to God[b]. The nearness of death and judgment is of itself an irresistible argument for maintaining an indifference to earthly things, and for exerting ourselves to the uttermost to secure a happy eternity. Such is the scope of the Apostle's words; in commenting on which we shall notice,

I. The declaration—

[It is possible that St. Peter, in speaking of "the end of all things," might have some reference to the destruction of Jerusalem, which was fast approaching, and to the consequent annihilation of the Jewish polity. But it is more probable that he referred to the end of the world, which was generally represented as so near, that St. Paul was obliged to rectify the mistake which had arisen in the minds of the Thessalonians with respect to it[c]. We may however justly consider it as relating to the hour of death, which is to every man "the end of all things" here below. Death terminates our prospects, whether pleasurable, lucrative, or ambitious ——— It puts a period to our hopes and fears, whether relating to this life or the next ——— It cuts short our joys, and our sorrows ——— It puts an end to all the means of salvation, so that there is no further opportunity for repentance and prayer, for hearing the word, for believing on Christ, or indeed for any thing which may at all benefit the soul ———

This period is nigh "at hand" to every one of us. If our life were prolonged to the age of Methuselah, the space would be only as the twinkling of an eye in comparison of eternity[d]: but it is contracted to a very narrow span; nor can we be sure that it shall continue even to the expiration of the present day:

[a] ver. 4.

[b] This seems to be the meaning of the verse before the text.

[c] 2 Thess. ii. 2, 3. [d] 2 Pet. iii. 8.

day: so justly may it be said of all of us, "The end of all things is at hand."]

The consideration of this solemn truth may well prepare us for,

II. The exhortation grounded upon it—

1. Be sober—

[Sobriety does not merely import temperance with relation to meat and drink, but moderation with regard to our desire of earthly things, or our enjoyment of them. Our minds are apt to be very strongly fixed on the things of time and sense; we are fascinated with the prospect of some pleasure, some honour, some emolument, for the attainment of which we labour day and night, and in the possession of which we are ready to say, "Soul, take thine ease." But should we do thus, if we considered how transient our enjoyment of them will be? Should we not rather sit loose to the things of this world, seeking them as though we sought them not, and using them as though we used them not[e]? Let us then cultivate this spirit[f]. We need not on this account relax our *diligence* in our earthly vocations; for diligence is our bounden duty[g], and will consist very well with the devoutest frame, and most ardent exertions in the Lord's service[h]: but "the *affections* must be set on things above, and *not on things below*[i]."]

2. Watch unto prayer—

[Prayer is indispensably necessary for the salvation of the soul. Without prayer, we can obtain nothing from God, no pardon of sin, no strength for obedience, no preparation for eternity. If we live without prayer, we shall die without hope. But it is no easy matter to persevere in prayer. We can complain to a fellow-creature with ease and fluency: but the moment we attempt to express our wants in prayer to God, our minds wander to the very ends of the earth, and our mouths are shut before him. Any trifling occurrence is sufficient to divert us from prayer: and we postpone this duty from time to time, under the idea of having some more favourable opportunity for the performance of it. But would it be thus with us, if we were duly impressed with the shortness and uncertainty of time? Even the most abandoned malefactors will weep and pray when their execution is drawing nigh: and should not *we*, if we felt that "the end of all things is at hand?" Let us then watch against every thing that may either divert us from prayer, or distract us in it: yea, let us

[e] 1 Cor. vii. 29—31. [f] Phil. iv. 5. [g] Eccl. ix. 10.
[h] Rom. xii. 11. [i] Col. iii. 2.

us watch that our prayers be such as our necessities require, and such as God will accept. Let them be offered up with constancy, with fervour, and with faith. And the nearer we approach to our latter end, the more "abundant let us be in supplications and thanksgivings."]

APPLICATION—

[*To the elder part of this assembly* one would think it should be needless to add any thing on this subject: for they who have already lived out half their days, must feel (one would imagine) that their "time is short." But, alas! even the aged need to be reminded of this obvious truth, and to be stirred up to improve their few remaining hours. Yes, even they often become more worldly with their advancing years, and manifest as great a backwardness to spiritual duties as they did in the earlier part of their existence. If one of this character be present, may God impress upon his mind a sense of his guilt and folly, and awaken him from his slumbers, ere it be too late!———

To the younger part, who dream of months and years to come, it is more obviously necessary to repeat the warning in the text. You are apt to think and say, "It is time enough yet for me to seek after God." But "have you made a covenant with death?" have you been assured that neither disease nor accident shall cut you off in the bloom of life? Look around you, and see how many of your own age are gone within your remembrance[k]. And what if death had seized on you, instead of them; where had you been at this moment? I intreat you, if you have any regard for your own souls, consider this. Put the question to your conscience, and answer it faithfully in the sight of God: and then look at the direction given you by God himself: "Be sober," and moderate in your attachment to the things of time; and "watch unto prayer," that you "may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory."]

[k] Here any recent deaths may be adverted to, and the circumstances of them, if peculiar, be specified.

MCLXIV.

PERSECUTION FOR CHRIST'S SAKE.

1 Pet. iv. 12—16. *Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye: for the Spirit of glory and*

and of God resteth upon you. On their part he is evil spoken of; but on your part he is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evil-doer, or as a busy-body in other men's matters. Yet, if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed: but let him glorify God on this behalf.

THE quiet and repose which Christians enjoy at this day, may seem to render a discourse on the subject of persecution quite uninteresting. But the whole New Testament abounds with warnings to expect it, encouragements to endure it, and directions how to conduct ourselves under it: nor is there any intimation given that this state of things was to be confined to the first ages, when Christianity was new in the world; or that "the offence of the cross should ever cease." On the contrary, we are taught to expect, that "they who are born after the flesh only, will hate those who are born after the Spirit;" and that "all who will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." The circumstance of Christianity having become the national religion, may justly be supposed to have abated somewhat of the fury of persecutors; whilst the protection afforded by the laws of the land keeps within bounds their hostility against those whom they hate for righteousness' sake. But I am not sure that much of our repose may not be ascribed to the low state of religion amongst us: and I cannot but think, that, if God were to pour out his Spirit upon us as he did on the primitive Church, and our light were to burn as bright as theirs, there would yet be found much the same rancour in the hearts of men against vital godliness now, as there was in former days: for there are not wanting at this hour many proofs of what men would do to suppress real piety, if the toleration accorded to us by the laws did not restrain them. At all events, we know not what trials we ourselves personally may be called to endure, even though the Church at large should still continue to enjoy tranquillity: and for these we ought to be prepared. The words before us are admirably calculated

culated to fortify our minds against all that at any time may come upon us; since, whilst they teach us to expect persecution for righteousness' sake, they shew us,

I. In what light we should view it—

"We should not think it strange as though some strange thing happened unto us"—

[God has seen fit to ordain that his people should be subjected to "fiery trials," not only for the discovery of their graces, but also for the improvement of them. To them he has given a new nature, altogether different from that which they brought into the world with them,—a nature, which for its excellence may be compared to gold: but there still remains in them much dross, which must be purged away: and, as gold is both ascertained and purified by the action of fire, so must these be tried and purified in the furnace of affliction. Of course, their persecutors have no such object in view: they seek only to suppress the piety that offends them: but God has other, and very opposite, ends to accomplish: He seeks their advancement in the divine life, and will suffer no heavier trial to assault them than what he has strengthened them to bear, and will overrule for their eternal welfare. True it is that, notwithstanding he has taught us to expect these things, we are ready to account them strange: we think it strange that *such trials* should come upon us, and from *such quarters*, and on *us who have done so little to deserve them*. But we should remember, that "the same trials are accomplished also in our Brethren who are in the world [a];" and that "none have come upon us but what are common to man, nor any which God will not enable us to sustain [b]:" and under this conviction we should receive them as our appointed lot, and submit to them as dispensations ordained by God for our eternal good.]

We should rather regard it as a ground of joy—

[On this subject there is but one testimony throughout all the holy Scriptures. Our blessed Lord says, "If ye be persecuted for righteousness' sake, rejoice ye, and leap for joy." St. Paul tells us, that the true Christian will "glory in tribulations [c]:" and that he himself actually "took pleasure in them" from the consideration that Christ's strength would thereby be displayed and glorified [d]. St. James bids us "count it all joy when we fall into divers temptations:" and gives it as his deliberate judgment, "We count them happy that

[a] 1 Pet. v. 9.
[b] 1 Cor. x. 13.
[c] Rom. v. 3.
[d] 2 Cor. xii. 10.

that endure[e]." St. Peter, as this whole Epistle informs us, had the same view of the subject: and therefore we feel warranted in saying to all of you, "If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye."]

In confirmation of this sentiment, I proceed to shew,

II. What reason we have for viewing it in that light—

Certainly it appears strange and paradoxical that the most cruel persecution for Christ's sake should be considered as a ground of *joy*. But this view of it is just: for, when we suffer for Christ's sake,

1. We are made "partakers of Christ's sufferings"—

[We all know, that if any part of the human body suffer, whether the head or members, the whole participates in the pain. Now the Lord Jesus Christ is the head of his mystical body, and we are the members: and when he suffered on the cross, we suffered with him; as it is written "We are crucified with Christ;" "we died with him;" "we were buried with him[f]." So when we suffer, he suffers, as it were, with us: as he said, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me[g]?" "In all our afflictions he is afflicted[h]:" and "he who toucheth us, toucheth the apple of his eye[i]." As far as respects an atonement made for sin, he suffered alone: but, that we may be conformed to his image in all things, he has ordained that His Church should complete and "fill up the measure of his sufferings:" so that, though in his own person he is beyond the reach of man's cruelty, he is still enduring much from it in the persons of his people. In truth, it is not on *their own* account that his people suffer any thing. If we would but renounce our allegiance to him, the world would find no more occasion against us. It is for *His sake* that they hate us. They hate not *us*, but *Christ in us*: nor do they persecute *us*, but *Christ in us*. Therefore our sufferings are his; and, in enduring them, "we are truly partakers of his sufferings."

Now then I would ask, 'If when he drank the bitter cup even to the dregs, and left, as it were, but a drop for us to taste, shall we account it a hard matter to put it to our

[e] Jam. i. 2. & v. 11.
[f] Gal. ii. 20. Rom. vi. 4, 8.
[g] Acts ix. 4.
[h] Isai. lxiii. 9.
[i] Zech. ii. 8.

our lips for his sake?' No: we should rather rejoice that an opportunity is afforded us of so testifying our love to him.]

2. The Spirit of God descends into our bosom, to support and comfort us—

[The Spirit is here called "The Spirit of glory and of God;" as being one with the Father, who is "the God of glory[k];" and one with the Son, who is "the Lord of Glory[l]." His office it is to descend and dwell with the saints, as their Comforter[m]. And when we really suffer for Christ's sake, it is both *an evidence that he does* rest upon us, and *a pledge that he will* be with us in a more abundant measure. If the Holy Spirit had not already wrought faith in our hearts, and put somewhat of the image of Christ upon our souls, the world would have suffered us to rest in peace: for "if we were of the world, the world would love its own; but because we are not of the world, but Christ has chosen us out of the world, therefore the world hateth us[n]." But the enmity of the world on account of what we have received from this divine Agent, only serves to call down upon us yet richer communications, even such as shall be sufficient to bear us up under our trials, and to make us conquerors over all our enemies.

And shall not this reconcile us to sufferings? Or, should any trials be deprecated, which are productive of so great a benefit? If the loss of Christ's bodily presence was a proper ground of joy to the Disciples, because of the presence of THE COMFORTER, who would come to them in his stead[o], much more may any loss or any trials be welcomed by us, if they may but lead to a more abundant effusion of this divine Spirit upon our souls.]

3. God is particularly glorified in us—

[Doubtless, on the part of the persecutors, God is dishonoured and blasphemed; but on the part of the sufferers he is glorified. Behold a man enduring sufferings for righteousness' sake: what does he say to all who behold him? In respect of *words*, he may be silent, as a lamb before its shearers: but by his *actions*, he proclaims in accents that cannot be misunderstood, My Lord is worthy of all this: never can I shew my love to him sufficiently: if I had a thousand lives, they would be well disposed of in his service: I am ready to bear any thing for him; and am so far from regretting that my love is thus put to the test, that I am thankful for it, inasmuch

[k] Acts vii 2.
[l] 1 Cor. ii. 8.
[m] John xiv. 16.
[n] John xv. 19.
[o] John xvi. 6, 7.

inasmuch as it gives me an opportunity of evincing my sense of his excellency, and the ardour of my love towards him:

In another view, too, his sufferings advance the glory of God; because they shew how powerful that grace must be, which enables a poor feeble worm to bear them, yea, and to rejoice and glory in them. Many persecutors have been perfectly amazed at the patience of the saints under the most cruel torments that could be inflicted on them: and have been led by the very conduct of the sufferers, not only to embrace the principles which were so mighty in operation, but even to subject themselves to the same torments which they themselves had inflicted upon them.

How does divine Grace triumph on such occasions as these! And who would not be willing to suffer, if only Christ might be so magnified, and the efficacy of his grace be so displayed[p]?]

4. Our eternal happiness is augmented—

[Soon will that Saviour who once died upon the cross come again in his glory to judge the world. Then will he gather together his elect from every quarter of the world; and bestow on them that recompence of reward, to which, whilst suffering for his sake, they had looked forward. He had told them beforehand, that "if they suffered with him, they should also be glorified together." He had told them, that their light and momentary afflictions should work for them a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. Even whilst they were in this life, he had given them an hundred-fold for all that they had lost or endured for his sake: but *then* will be the time for their "FULL reward."

Tell me then, I pray you, Will Moses in that day regret that he had "esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt?" Or will those feel any regret, who, "when tortured, would not accept deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection?" Will any of the Apostles regret that they sealed the truth with their blood? Or will any of you regret that you were "faithful unto death, when God shall put upon your heads the crown of life?" No: one moment of that joy will far overbalance whole years of pain. What then will not be our triumph through all eternity?]

But, as this subject may be misapplied, let me shew you,

III. What we should especially guard against, in relation to it—

We

[p] Phil. i. 20 2 Cor. iv. 10, 11.

We must not bring trials on ourselves by any misconduct of our own—

[It is possible enough, that a wild enthusiast may fancy himself at liberty to disregard all human laws, and, whilst suffering for the violation of them, may conceive himself to be bearing the cross of Christ. Even war itself has been waged, under the idea of its being a service acceptable to God: and even within our own memory has a spirit of insubordination and rebellion been too lightly cherished under the cloak of religion. But when persons reap the just reward of such conduct, so far are they from honouring God, that they greatly dishonour him, and expose religion itself to hatred and contempt. The being "a busy-body in other men's matters," is no uncommon character amongst those who profess religion; and who indulge an assuming, prying, officious spirit, under the idea of rendering a service to God and man. We may also yet more commonly see amongst professors a neglect of their own proper calling; an intrusion into the callings of others; a substitution of services which do not belong to them, in the place of others which are proper to their situation; an impatience of reproof; an unbecoming pertness towards their superiors; and a self-will, that knows no bounds. Ah, Brethren! if ye suffer for such conduct as this, think not that ye are to expect any recompence at the hands of God: the cross which you are called to bear is not Christ's, but your own: and what is inflicted on you by man is only a prelude of a yet sorer punishment that shall be inflicted on you by God, even by that God whom you profess to serve, but whose name you dishonour, and whose displeasure you incur.]

But, if we suffer really as Christians, we may rejoice in all that we endure—

[Our enemies may think that they load us with disgrace: but shame in such a cause is no shame: it is honour: and we may take it up, and bind it on us as a diadem. The Apostles, when imprisoned and scourged for the truth's sake, "went out from their persecutors, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for the name of Christ." And thus may we do, turning the very indignities that are cast upon us into an occasion of praise to God. Thus "out of the eater we shall bring forth meat, and out of the strong we shall bring forth sweetness."]

Two HINTS, as rising from this subject, I would beg leave to suggest,

1. In embracing religion, be deliberate—

[Religion, sooner or later, will subject you to trials: for our Lord has plainly warned us, that, "if we will be his disciples, we must deny ourselves, and take up our cross, and follow him." He tells us farther, that, "if we hate not father and mother, and even life itself, for his sake, we cannot be his disciples." Then, before we profess ourselves his people, we should "count the cost:" we should consider, whether we are willing to "part with all for the pearl of great price." To what trials we may be subjected, we know not; but we must be prepared for the worst. For I have no hesitation in saying, that it were better never to follow Christ at all, than to follow him for a season, and then turn back from him: "It were better never to have known the way of righteousness, than, after having known it, to turn away from it: for the last end of such a man is worse than his beginning."]

2. In maintaining it, be firm—

[If persecution arise for righteousness' sake, you must not be thinking how you may escape it, so much as how you may glorify God under it. I mean not to say, that, "if persecuted in one city, you may not flee to another;" for that liberty was conceded by our Lord himself to his disciples: but this I mean; that you should not for a moment think of conciliating your enemies by any sinful concession. Your duty to God must be paramount to every other consideration. Your great concern must be, to approve yourselves faithful to him. The Hebrew Youths with the fiery furnace in their view, and Daniel in expectation of the den of lions, thought of nothing but their duty to their God. So you must fear God, and God only. And, if it please God that you should be called to martyrdom itself, be content to "go through much tribulation in your way to the kingdom;" and to ascend to heaven in a chariot of fire.]

MCLXV.

HUMILITY INCULCATED.

1 Pet. v. 5. *Be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.*

AS words are nothing more than sounds whereby to convey ideas, it may seem of little importance what words are used, provided that the ideas annexed to them are sufficiently distinct. But I conceive, that the adopting of a word which was in use among the unenlightened Heathen, and continuing to use

use it as they did, when from the superior light of Christianity we know that all the sentiments and feelings originally annexed to it were bad, has a direct tendency to counteract the Gospel, and to perpetuate the darkness of Heathenism in the land. I refer here to the word *pride*; which is frequently used in common conversation, and at the bar, and in the Senate, yea and even in the pulpit too, in a good sense; as "a just pride," and "an honest pride." But I know no passage of Scripture that sanctions the feelings which are associated with that term: or, if the term be so explained as to convey nothing but what is consistent with Christianity, still I conceive that such an use of it is highly inexpedient, because it tends to foster in the mind an approbation of sentiments which are in direct opposition to the morality of the Gospel. *Humility* is the grace which alone becomes the Christian moralist; and the cherishing of any feeling contrary to humility, will, as the Apostle informs us, in my text, expose us to God's heaviest displeasure.

In confirmation of this, I will endeavour to unfold,

I. The duty here enjoined—

Humility is not a mere insulated grace, if I may so speak, like patience, or meekness, or any other virtue, but a feeling which pervades the whole man, and is called forth into exercise with every grace. Humility is that to the Christian which holiness is to the Deity. Holiness is not a distinct attribute of the Deity, like justice, or mercy, or power, but a perfection that is blended with all the other attributes, and is the crown and glory of them all. So humility is the warp in the Christian's loom: and all other graces, whether of a lively or sombre hue, are the woof, by which the piece is diversified: but from beginning to end, humility pervades it all. On this account, I must speak of humility in a large and extended view, and notice it in all its actings, whether towards God or man.

But there is another reason why this grace must be

be thus extensively considered; namely, that the Apostle himself here speaks of it in this comprehensive view. If we look at the words which precede my text, we shall find that humility is spoken of as exercised towards men: but in the words immediately following my text, it is connected with our duty to God: "*All of you be subject one to another,* and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace unto the humble. *Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God,* that he may exalt you in due time."

Let us then notice this grace,

1. As exercised towards God—

[Here it must begin. We cannot have one spark of real humility till we are abased before God, as guilty, helpless, and undone creatures, who have no hope but in the tender mercy of God in Christ Jesus. We must, as far as respects all hope in ourselves, feel ourselves in the very condition of the fallen angels, whose sin we have followed, and whose punishment we are doomed to share. Indeed, indeed, this is our very state, whether we know it or not: and it becomes us to seek the knowledge of it, and to live under a sense of it every day, and all the day long. We should never appear either before God or man in any other dress than this. It was the clothing of holy Job when in his most perfect state[a]: and so far ought we to be from putting it off because God is reconciled towards us, that a sense of our acceptance with him through Christ should operate as an additional motive for making it the one continual habit of our minds[b]. Incessantly should we lie low before him in dust and ashes, and rely altogether upon "his mercy to pardon us, and his grace to help us in every time of need."]

2. As exercised towards men—

[I forbear to mention any other exercises of this grace towards God, in order that I may keep the subject as simple and intelligible as I can. But in viewing its exercises towards man, I must of necessity diversify it somewhat more. Its chief actings will be found to consist in the following things: We must *regard ourselves* as the lowest of all; and *be willing to be treated by others,* as the lowest of all; and gladly *execute the meanest offices,* as the lowest of all.

We must *regard ourselves* as the lowest of all; "esteeming others better than ourselves[c]," and "preferring them in honour

[a] Job xlii. 5, 6. [b] Ezek. xvi. 63. [c] Phil. ii. 3.

honour before ourselves[d]," and being ready in all places, and on all occasions, to "take the lowest place[e]." It is not indeed necessary that we should accuse ourselves of sins which we have not committed, or deny the superiority of virtue to vice: but we should have such a sense of the peculiar advantages we have enjoyed, and the infinite obligations we lie under, and the consequent aggravations that have attended the many evils which we have committed, that we should account ourselves "less than the least of all saints[f]," yea, the very "chief of sinners[g]."

Nor must we be offended if we be *treated by others* as deserving of this character. It is only from pride and a conceit of something good in us, that we are induced to lay to heart the contempt and ignominy that are cast upon us. If we are sincere in abhorring ourselves, it will be a small matter to us that we are abhorred by others. David deserved not the reproaches of his wife Michal: but, when he heard them, he was not moved with indignation against her, but meekly replied, "I will be yet more vile than thus, and will be base in my own sight[h]." It was but a small matter to the holy Apostles, that they were considered "as the filth of the world, and the off-scouring of all things[i]:" they knew that they deserved nothing but wrath and indignation at the hands of God; and, having obtained mercy of the Lord, they cared not what treatment they met with at the hands of men. To be rendered conformable to our Divine Master in the bitterest reproaches, or the most ignominious death, will, if we be truly humble, be a matter rather of joy and gratitude than of mourning and complaint.

At the same time, we must be willing to *take on ourselves the lowest offices*. To become "the servant of all[k]" must be our highest ambition. Even the Lord of Glory himself, in the days of his flesh, came not to be ministered unto, but to minister: and this he did, even to the "washing of his Disciples' feet[l]:" yea, "though he was in the form of God, and thought it not robbery to be equal with God, yet he took upon him the form of a servant, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." "*This is the mind* that should be in us[m]:" and this is the example which, as far as circumstances will admit of it, we should follow.

Here is the perfection of humility: and this is the grace which every one of us should be putting on from day to day.]

Nothing can more strongly mark the importance of this duty, than,

II. The

[d] Rom. xii. 10. [e] Luke xiv. 10. [f] Eph. iii. 8.
[g] 1 Tim. i. 15. [h] 2 Sam. vi. 22. [i] 1 Cor. iv. 13.
[k] Mark x. 44. [l] John xi. 13, 14. [m] Phil. ii. 5—8.

II. The considerations with which it is enforced—

The declaration, that "God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble," is cited from the book of Proverbs: and, that it deserves especial attention, is evident from this; that St. James, as well as St. Peter, adduces it for the warning and instruction of the Catholic Church[n].

1. "God resisteth the proud"—

[He does so: he *abhors the very persons* of the proud: "they are an abomination to him[o]:" he perfectly scorns them[p]: and "knows them afar off," as objects whom he disdains to look upon[q].

He will not hear any prayer that they may offer up. See the Pharisee and the Publican. You would imagine that a man who could make such appeals to God, respecting his manifold and self-denying services, should surely find acceptance at the throne of Grace; whilst a man so conscious of his vileness as the Publican was, and with so little to say in his own behalf, should, comparatively at least, be disregarded. But the very reverse was the case; for "the Publican went down to his house justified rather than the other:" and this is declared to be the universal rule of God's procedure; for that "every one who exalteth himself shall be abased; but he, and he only, that humbleth himself, shall be exalted[r]."

Nor will God communicate to such persons any spiritual blessing. Instead of drawing them to himself, "he will scatter the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He will fill the hungry with good things, but the rich he will send empty away[s]." Their "esteeming themselves to be rich and increased in goods, and to have need of nothing, when they are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked," renders them perfectly disgusting in his sight; and the higher they are in their own estimation, the more he nauseates and abhors them[t].

But this is not all; for *he will surely fight against them, to bring them down.* Nebuchadnezzar from his own experience attested, that "those who walk in pride, God *is able* to abase;" and, he might with truth have added also, *is determined* to abase. For the prophet Isaiah has plainly warned us, that "the lofty looks of men shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down; and the Lord alone shall be

[n] See Jam. iv. 6. [o] Prov. vi. 16, 17.
[p] Prov. iii. 34. *This is the passage that is cited* both by St. Peter and St. James.
[q] Ps. cxxxviii. 6. [r] Luke xviii. 14. [s] Luke i. 51, 53.
[t] Rev. iii. 16, 17.

be exalted: for the day of the Lord of Hosts shall be upon every one that is proud and lofty, and upon every one that is lifted up; and he shall be brought low[u]."

Now, I pray you, let this consideration be duly weighed, in order that you may with zeal and earnestness address yourselves to the duty that is here inculcated. If you bring not a broken and contrite spirit before God, and if you exercise not a spirit of meekness and lowliness before men, think not that God will ever look with complacency upon you, or acknowledge himself as your friend: for assuredly he is, and will be, your enemy, and will sooner or later resent the dishonour which you do unto him. He may not inflict on you such judgments as he did on Nebuchadnezzar or on Herod: if he only leave you to yourselves, you will soon find what an evil and bitter thing it is to cherish such a disposition in your hearts: for as "pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall[x]," you may expect the effects of spiritual dereliction; you may expect, that, "being lifted up with pride, you will fall into the condemnation of the devil[y]."]

2. He "giveth grace unto the humble"—

[What will he not do for those who are of an humble and contrite spirit? If there were but one such object in the whole universe, God would look through all the shining ranks of angels that surround his throne, and fix his eyes on him[z]: he would even come down to him, and dwell with him; yea, and dwell with him for the express purpose of comforting and reviving his drooping soul[a]. If he offered up a prayer, God would hear and answer it[b]: if, on any sudden emergency, he only poured forth a cry, God would attend to it, and not forget it[c]: and if there were only a desire in his heart, even that should be noted, in order to satisfy and fulfil it[d]. See this exemplified in king Josiah. God had determined to destroy Jerusalem: but because Josiah was of an humble spirit, he would first take him to himself, and not suffer him to witness the calamities which were coming upon his nation: "Because thine heart was tender, and thou didst *humble thyself* before God, when thou heardest his words against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, and *humbledst thyself* before me, and didst rend thy clothes, and weep before me, I have even heard thee also, saith the Lord[e]." See it yet more strongly illustrated in the case of the most wicked man that perhaps ever existed upon the face of the earth, the man that made the very streets of Jerusalem to run down with the blood of innocents, and set up his idols in the very House

[u] Isai. ii. 11, 12.
[x] Prov. xvi. 18.
[y] 1 Tim. iii. 6.
[z] Isai. lxvi. 2.
[a] Isai. lvii. 15.
[b] Job xxxiii. 27, 28.
[c] Ps. ix. 12.
[d] Ps. x. 17.
[e] 2 Chron. xxxiv. 27.

House of God: see it, I say, in the case of king Manasseh; of whom it is said, "When he was in affliction, he besought the Lord his God, and *humbled him greatly* before the God of his fathers, and prayed unto him:" behold! of this man it is said, "God was intreated of him, and heard his supplication[f]."

Say now, whether here be not encouragement enough to seek humility? Find an humble person to whom God ever refused any thing. You cannot. A humble person may be "cast down for a time: but he shall soon be lifted up: for *God will save the humble person*[g]."]

What shall I then ADD to these considerations?

[You need no other inducement to work either upon your hopes or fears. To have God your enemy, determined to "resist you," would be the greatest evil that could befal you: but to have him your Friend, pledged to supply you with all the blessings of grace and glory, would be the summit of human bliss. Commending then this alternative to your devoutest meditations, I would say to all of you in the animated language of the Prophet, "Awake, awake, put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city[h]." There is nothing so "becoming to one of God's elect, as humbleness of mind[i]," nor any ornament he can wear so pleasing to his God[k]. Come then, Beloved, and clothe yourselves with humility; and wear it so at all times, that you may be known by it, as a man is by his accustomed dress: so shall "God be glorified in you," and all who behold you be compelled to "acknowledge, that God is with you of a truth."]

[f] 2 Chron. xxxiii. 12, 13. [g] Job xxii. 29. [h] Isai. lii. 1.
[i] Col. iii. 12. [k] 1 Pet. iii. 4.

MCLXVI.

GOD'S GOODNESS AN ENCOURAGEMENT TO PRAYER.

1 Pet. v. 10, 11. *But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered awhile, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you: to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever; Amen.*

AMONGST the various testimonies of affection which faithful Ministers will give to their people, that of praying for them is the most unequivocal, and most important. And in this the Apostles eminently distinguish themselves in all their Epistles. In

In the petitions before us, we behold the glowing zeal of Peter, studious to exalt the honour of his God, and to promote to the utmost the welfare of the saints.

His words scarcely admit of any profitable distribution: we shall therefore make some observations on them, in the order in which they lie.

The first thing that calls for our attention is, the honourable appellation he gives to God—

[God is the only fountain of all grace. There is none in the creature, which has not been derived from him[a]. But in him is "all grace;" converting, comforting, sanctifying, establishing grace. He is "the God of" all grace: all kinds of it, and all degrees, are in him. Whatever be the grace that we severally want, we shall find an inexhaustible fulness of it treasured up in him. And, if we ask of him in terms of the most extensive import, and then stretch our imaginations far beyond what it is in the power of language to express, it still will be true, that "he giveth *more* grace[b];" and giveth it *freely* too, according to his own sovereign will[c], even to the very chief of sinners.]

Next, we have an account of what God has done for his believing people—

[God has "called *them*," not merely by the outward Ministry of his Gospel, (for that he has vouchsafed to thousands who reject him,) but by the inward operation of his grace. Nor is it to any common mercy that he has called them, but to "his glory," yea, to the "eternal" enjoyment of it. What a stupendous act of grace!———Yet this is greatly heightened by the means which he has used for the communication of this blessing. He has sent it by *the Ministry*, (by the *Ministry*, do I say?—hear, O ye heavens, and be astonished, O earth!) He imparts it through *the mediation* of "Christ Jesus," his only dear Son.

O that this glorious description of the Deity might always be remembered by us in our addresses at the throne of Grace!]

The petitions which the Apostle offered on behalf of the saints, were exactly such as their state required—

[They were now enduring "a great fight of afflictions:" and, in order that they might persevere unto the end, it was necessary

[a] John i. 16. [b] Jam. iv. 6. [c] Matt. xx. 15. 1 Cor. xii. 11.

necessary that they should be "established" in *the faith*, "strengthened" in *the profession*, and "settled" in *the enjoyment* of the Gospel. For these things therefore the Apostle prayed; knowing, by bitter experience, that they must come from God, the only Author of such inestimable blessings[d]. For these things also should our prayers be offered: and *the consideration of what God is in himself, and has done for us, may well encourage us to offer the most enlarged petitions.* If we "open our mouth ever so wide, we need not doubt but that he will fill it[e]."]

His prayers, however, were qualified with a very necessary concession—

[God has not given us any reason to expect an exemption from suffering: on the contrary, he has told us plainly, that our road to heaven lies through much tribulation[f]. Even "Christ himself was made perfect through sufferings;" and every Child of man must be conformed to him in this respect. Sufferings are sent to try, to illustrate, and to confirm our grace; and finally, to work out for us a proportionable weight of glory. The Apostle therefore did not presume to interfere with the established order of things; but only to pray, that their trials might be as light and transient, as would consist with the accomplishment of their proper ends[g]. In this respect he sets us a good example; and teaches us to desire rather a sanctified use of our afflictions, than a premature removal of them.]

To these he added a doxology well suited to the occasion—

[Who can reflect on what God is in himself, or on what he has done for us, or on what he is ready to do for us, and not desire that his name may be glorified, and that every thought may be subjected to his holy will? When the Apostle says, "To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever;" who is not ready to exclaim with ardent affection, "Amen, and amen?"

O Brethren, let such views occupy our attention, and such prayers and praises be ever ascending from the altar of our hearts!]

This subject may be of USE,

1. For reproof—

[How far are the generality of professing Christians from such exalted views of God, or such deep concern for the welfare

[d] αὐτὸς, though not noticed in the translation, seems to have considerable force.

[e] Ps. lxxxi. 10. [f] Acts xiv. 22. [g] ὀλίγον παθόντας.

welfare of men's souls! If they think of God in the quality of a Governor and Judge, they are not conscious of any defect, though they scarce ever raise their minds to him as their adorable Benefactor: and, if they occasionally promote the comfort of men's bodies, they seem to themselves excused for not attending to their souls. But, Beloved, let us not be contented to live in so low a region, or to exercise so little grace: but let our love to God and man bear some affinity and proportion to the love that God has shewn to us.]

2. For encouragement—

[What is there that we may not expect at the hands of such a God? We may go to him for ourselves; we may go to him for others: we may ask of him all manner of grace: the weakest may obtain strength; and the most wavering may obtain establishment in the Divine life. Let us know the privilege of prayer. Let us, especially under our afflictions, betake ourselves to a throne of Grace: and if, while we are praying to him, our trials increase[h], let us not be discouraged: only let us tarry his leisure; and our sorrows shall ere long be turned to joy, and *our prayers to praise*[i].]

[h] This was the case with the Israelites, Exod. v. 5—19. with xii. 33.

[i] Eph. iii. 20.

MCLXVII.

PETER'S SALUTATION TO THE SAINTS.

2 Pet. i. 1, 2. *Simon Peter, a servant and an Apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ: grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.*

IN reading the Epistles of the different Apostles, whether written to particular Churches, or to the whole Catholic Church throughout the world, we cannot but be struck with the benevolence which they breathe in every part, and especially in the salutations with which they begin, and the benedictions with which they close. In the words which we have now read, which, as in the former epistle, are addressed to the whole Church scattered through the Roman Empire, we may notice two things,—An inscription,—and A salutation: to both of which we will now turn your attention.

I. The

I. The Inscription—

Here the Apostle describes,

1. The Writer—

[His own proper name was Simon, or Simeon, as he is called in the original and by the apostle James[a]. The name Peter was given to him by his Lord on two different occasions; partly, to mark his characteristic boldness; and partly to intimate, that on his testimony both to Jews and Gentiles the Christian Church should be established[b]. The office he held as a servant and an Apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ was the highest that could be assigned to mortal man: and the peculiar care which he took in thus designating his own name and character satisfies our minds that this epistle, no less than the former which bears his name, was written by him: for no bad man would have written it; and no good man could have been guilty of such a forgery as that of assuming the name and office of this inspired Apostle.]

2. The persons addressed—

[These were Believers throughout the world. They "had faith" in our Lord Jesus Christ, as the only Saviour of fallen man. They had "obtained" this faith, not by any efforts of their own, but, as it were, *by lot*, just as all the tribes of Israel obtained their portion in the Promised Land. To each the precise measure was assigned by God himself: nor was there one throughout the whole land who was not constrained to acknowledge that he owed his portion solely to the free and sovereign grace of God[c]———This faith was precisely "the same" whether in Apostles or private Christians, and "alike precious" to them all: for though the faith of different persons might differ widely in its degrees and consequent operations, it was "alike precious" to all, inasmuch as it was the one means of uniting them to Christ, and of saving their souls alive——— "Through the righteousness of God our Saviour" too was this faith obtained: for by that righteousness it was purchased for them; and through the prevalence of that righteousness, as pleaded with God in their behalf, was the gift of faith imparted to them———

In this respect, then, every saint under heaven answers to the character drawn by the Apostle, and may consider the epistle as addressed personally to his own self in particular, as much as ever it was to the Saints in the Apostle's days.]

From the Inscription we pass on to,

II. The Salutation—

"Grace

[a] Acts xv. 14. [b] John i. 42. Matt. xvi. 18. [c] λαχοῦσι.

"Grace and peace" comprehend all the blessings of the Gospel—

[Sometimes, in the salutations of the Apostles, "mercy" is added; "Grace, mercy, and peace:" but generally it is, as here, "Grace and peace." By "Grace" I understand all that is necessary for the transformation of the soul into the Divine image; and by "peace," all that is necessary for the comfort and encouragement of the soul in its progress heavenward———]

These the Apostle desired to be "multiplied" unto the Saints—

[There should be no measure of these in which we should rest; seeing that there is no measure which may not be greatly and abundantly increased. We should therefore, even if our attainments were equal to those of the apostle Paul, "forget what is behind, and reach forth to that which is before"———]

They are to be multiplied solely "through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord"—

[It is by that knowledge alone that grace and peace are at first obtained: When we look to God as reconciled to us in Christ Jesus, then grace and peace flow down into our souls[d]. In like manner, it is only through an increasing acquaintance with this mystery that we grow up into Christ, and are transformed into his image[e]. Contemplate then more and more the wonders of Redeeming Love: and be assured, that in proportion as you are enabled to comprehend them, you shall "be filled with all the fulness of God[f]."]

ADDRESS—

[Receive this as a faithful expression of my regards for you: and pray for me, that what I desire in your behalf, I may richly experience in my own soul.]

[d] John xvii. 3. 2 Cor. iv. 6. [e] 2 Cor. iii. 18. [f] Eph. iii. 18, 19.

MCLXVIII.

THE CHRISTIAN'S GRACES.

2 Pet. i. 5—9. *Besides this, giving all diligence, add to your faith, virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly-kindness; and to brotherly-kindness, charity. For, if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge*

ledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins.

GREAT and unspeakable are the blessings vouchsafed to us by the Gospel: for in it "God hath given to us all things that pertain unto life and godliness;" and "through the exceeding great and precious promises contained in it, we are made partakers of a Divine nature, and are enabled to escape the corruptions which are in the world through lust[a]." Yet we are not to suppose that these blessings will flow down upon us without any effort on our part to obtain them. We must, if I may so speak, be "workers together with God;" or as my text expresses it, must "give all diligence to add" one grace to another, in order to our growing up into a perfect man.

Were we to enter minutely into every part of this exhortation, we should only distract your minds by too great a diversity of matter. It will be more instructive and edifying to compress the subject, so as to preserve its unity, and to bring before you in one point of view what we conceive to be the mind of the Holy Ghost in this important passage. For this end we will commend to your attention,

I. The import of the exhortation—

Two things we see in it;

1. What are the graces which we are called to exercise—

[It is here taken for granted that we have "faith;" for, in truth, we have no pretensions to call ourselves Christians till we have believed in Christ, and are united to him as branches of the living vine.

Assuming then that we are true Believers, we must "add to our faith virtue." By virtue we are not to understand that general assemblage of graces which in modern language is associated with that term; but courage, which is absolutely necessary to the Christian's welfare. A man who will be faithful to his God, and walk worthy of his profession, will have much to contend with, both from without, and from within: and, if he be not endued with fortitude, he will be in danger of yielding to discouragement, and turning back from his profession. Even

[a] ver. 3, 4.

Even the sneers of an ungodly world are not easy to bear: and thousands, through the fear of them, have made shipwreck of their faith. We must therefore be bold, if we would be "good soldiers of Jesus Christ."

"To our virtue we must add knowledge." By "knowledge" I understand, not general information, but wisdom and prudence, without which our courage may lead us astray, and prove injurious to the cause which we profess to serve. We must seek "a spirit of power, and of love, and of *a sound mind*[b]." Among the children of Issachar, we are told, "there were men that had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do[c]." Such should we be. The same conduct, if pursued at all times and under all circumstances, would be very absurd: and perhaps scarcely in any thing does the adult Christian differ from the child more than in the exercise of "sound wisdom and discretion," by which he is enabled to avoid the errors of the inexperienced[d], and to "walk wisely before God in a perfect way[e]."

To this must "temperance be added." In this term also there is more implied than we generally annex to it. In this catalogue of graces it would appear a small thing to say, that we should abstain "from surfeiting and drunkenness;" (though that doubtless is necessary for Christians too[f].) We are, as has been before noted, in a state which calls for bold and judicious exertions: and as those who contended in the Grecian games were "temperate in all things," in order that their bodily strength and agility might qualify them for their contests[g], so are we to be temperate, in order to insure success in our spiritual conflicts. We should sit loose to all the things of time and sense, as well to those which are lawful as those which are unlawful; "using every thing so as not to abuse it[h]," and "keeping under all our bodily appetites, and bringing them into subjection, lest, after all our profession, we become reprobates[i]."

"Patience" is another grace which must be added to all the former. And this too, like all the former, must be understood in somewhat of a larger sense, not merely as a meek submission to trials, but as a persevering effort to fulfil all the will of God. We are told, that "we have need of patience, that, after we have done the will of God, we may obtain the promise[k]:" and it is only "by a patient continuance in well-doing, that we ever can obtain glory, and honour, and immortality[l]." This grace then must be added to all the rest. We must never be weary, either in doing, or in suffering, the will of God: but, as the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath

[b] 2 Tim. i. 7.
[c] Ps. ci. 2.
[d] Prov. iii. 21—23.
[e] 1 Chron. xii. 32.
[f] Luke xxi. 34.
[g] 1 Cor. ix. 25.
[h] 1 Cor. vii. 29—31.
[i] 1 Cor. ix. 27.
[k] Heb. x. 36.
[l] Rom. ii. 7.

hath long-patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain; so must we "be patient, and establish our hearts, till the Lord himself shall come," to crown, and to reward our labours[m].

We must not however rest here. "To patience we must add godliness:" for without a pious regard to God, all our efforts will be in vain. We may conceive of all the foregoing graces as exercised by a Heathen: but we must have that sublime piety which no Heathen can possess. We must see the hand of God in every thing; and receive every thing as from him; and do every thing as for him; making his will the rule, and his glory the end, of all our actions. At the same time, we must walk with him, and delight ourselves in him, and maintain sweet fellowship with him as our Father and our friend, and must look for his approbation as our great reward.

To this there is yet another grace which we must add, and that is "brotherly-kindness." We are all one family, and must regard every member of that family with a truly fraternal affection. It is "by this love one to another that all men are to know us for Christ's Disciples[n];" and by it we ourselves also are to judge of our having "passed from death unto life[o]."

That which closes the train, and which must of necessity be added to all the rest, is "charity." For though there is an especial regard due to "the household of faith[p]," our love must not be confined to them: it must be extended to all, even to enemies; and must so pervade our whole spirit and temper, and so regulate all our words and actions, as to evince that we are indeed Children of Him, whose name and nature is "Love[q]."]

2. The importance of them to the Christian character—

[No words can declare the importance of these graces to the Christian more forcibly than those in which the Apostle has declared it in my text: for he asserts, that *the constant exercise of them will prove us to be intelligent and consistent Christians, whilst the want of them will prove us ignorant and inconsistent.*

Attend to these assertions. "If these things be in you, and abound, they make you (that is, they *render*, or *constitute*[r] you) neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." How shall it be known that any man possesses a truly Scriptural and saving knowledge of Christ? It cannot be determined by his professions, but by the whole of his spirit and deportment. As a tree is known by its fruits, so

[m] Jam. v. 7, 8. [n] John xiii. 35. [o] 1 John iii. 14.
[p] Gal. vi. 10. [q] 1 John iv. 8, 16. [r] καθίστησιν.

so is the faithful follower of Christ. If indeed these graces could flow from any other source than an union with the Lord Jesus, they would determine nothing respecting the reality of our faith in him: but they cannot. A man may have valour, and knowledge, and temperance, and patience without any acquaintance with the Lord Jesus: but the whole assemblage of graces that are here mentioned he cannot have: they can be wrought in the soul only by the Spirit of God: and the Spirit can be supplied by none but the Lord Jesus Christ, "in whom is the residue of the Spirit[s]," and in whom dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily[t]:" And to none will Jesus so impart the Holy Spirit but to those who believe in him. Hence the existence and operation of these graces in the soul is a decisive evidence, that our faith in Christ is lively, our knowledge of him spiritual, and our walk before him consistent.

On the contrary, "he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off; and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins." A speculative knowledge may be possessed to a great extent, without any practical effect: but the circumstance of its being inoperative, clearly shews, that the person possessing it has no spiritual discernment. He is blind, or at best very dim-sighted, as to the excellency of the principles which he maintains: he sees not their proper tendency: he is unconscious of the worthlessness of mere notions, however just they may be, if separated from their practical effects: he betrays an utter ignorance of the nature of true religion: and he shews, that he has forgotten all the professions which he made, and the vows that he took upon him, when first he was baptized into the name of Christ. When by baptism he entered into covenant with God, he professed, that, as he expected the remission of sins through the blood of Christ, so he expected the mortification of sin by the spirit of Christ. He engaged, that from that hour he would seek a conformity to Christ, "dying *unto* sin, as Christ died *for* sin, and rising again unto righteousness, even as Christ rose again to a new and heavenly life[u]." But by his want of all these graces, or his allowed deficiency in the exercise of them, he shews, that he has forgotten all his former engagements, and is an ignorant and inconsistent professor, who disgraces that holy name by which he is called.

Now, I say, attend to these assertions of the Apostle, and judge whether the graces before-mentioned be not indispensably necessary to the Christian character, and whether we ought not to "give all diligence" to have the whole train of them exhibited in our lives.]

In

[s] Matt. ii. 15. [t] Cor. i. 19. & ii. 9. [u] Rom. vi. 3—6.

In further considering the Apostle's exhortation, let us notice,

II. The insight which it gives us into pure and undefiled religion—

We should not be satisfied with viewing truth in abstract and detached parts: we should endeavour to acquire enlarged views of religion; to see it in all its bearings, and to get our minds duly impressed with its excellency and grandeur. In this we shall be greatly assisted by the Apostle's exhortation; which, whilst with prismatic accuracy it brings before us the separate rays of which religion is composed, presents in their united power the full radiance of the Christian system.

See then in this passage the excellency of true religion:

1. How comprehensive it is in its nature!

[There is not any situation in which we can be placed, wherein religion does not prescribe the path that shall be pursued; nor any variety of circumstances that can occur, in which it does not meet with a corresponding variety of limitations and exceptions. There is not an operation of the human mind which it does not undertake to regulate, and require to be under its exclusive controul. Perhaps we may fitly compare it with the office of the soul in our animal frame. Without the soul, the body is dead. By its presence, the human frame is animated throughout. The soul pervades, and operates in, every part. Not the smallest motion of the body is independent of it. Whatever faculties be called into exercise, they derive all their power and energy from it. It is altogether through its agency, that the eye sees, the ear hears, the hand moves. And these different powers are exercised with ease, because of the entire presence of the soul's energies in every part. Were there a single member, even the smallest in the human frame, that did not experience its power, it would be paralyzed, and the body, *as a whole*, would be deformed. Now thus it is that religion takes possession of the soul. Till that occupies the soul, the soul is dead: but when that descends into the soul, all our powers, whether of mind, or body, are subjected to its controul. The influence of it being universal, its actings are easy, and without effort. If indeed there be an occasion that requires more than ordinary exertion, a suitable energy is put forth, just as in the human frame, when necessity requires.

Now

Now what a view is this of religion! How grand, how glorious does it appear! Yet is this the view of it as set before us in the text, where every habit and disposition of the human mind is regulated by its requirements, and called forth into exercise by its vital energies. Such was St. Paul's view of it when he said, "May the God of peace sanctify you wholly! And I pray God, your whole spirit and soul and body may be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ[x]."]

2. How connected in its parts!

[Which of the graces which the Apostle has enumerated in my text, can you dispense with? The whole forms a chain; of which, if one link be broken, the entire use is destroyed. Some indeed of these appear of less importance than others: but not only is every one of them necessary in its place, but every one must partake of the others that are connected with it, and can only operate with effect, when its exercise is so tempered. For instance; what would valour be without prudence? or prudence without temperance? or temperance without patience? or patience without godliness? or godliness without brotherly-kindness? or brotherly-kindness without charity? Take any one away, and the beauty and excellence of the whole will vanish altogether. St. Paul well illustrates this idea in his description of the Christian's armour. The sword, the shield, the helmet, the greaves, the breast-plate, and the girdle, are all necessary in their place[y]: the loss of any one would be severely felt by the Christian combatant, and occasion his ultimate failure in his warfare. We must have "the whole armour," or none. So the want of any one of the graces specified in our text would suffice to ruin the soul for ever. Our Lord has told us this in the most express terms. He supposes that we may fall short only in some one particular point: and that for that failure we may have an excuse, which might appear sufficient to satisfy any candid mind. The particular evil which we know not how to part with may be dear to us as a right eye, or necessary to us as a right hand. Yet, if we submit not to pluck out the one, or amputate the other, our whole body shall be cast into hell, "where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched[z]." In this the beauty of religion, as the beauty of the human frame, consists; only with this difference; that the body, though defective in its parts, may live: but the soul, if any one grace be wanting, is dead.

I pray you, Brethren, consider this; and let the truth of it receive a daily illustration from your conduct. Never place religion in any *one* duty, or in any one *set* of duties; but let all

[x] 1 Thess. v. 23. [y] Eph. vi. 13—17. [z] Mark ix. 42—48.

all the graces of the Spirit have their appropriate place, their seasonable attention, and their harmonious exercise.]

3. How lovely in its influence!

[Only conceive of any person living in the constant exercise of all these graces: how amiable, how godlike I had almost said, would be his deportment! Then conceive of a whole family penetrated with this spirit, and what a picture of heaven would you behold! But conceive of religion filling, as assuredly it will one day fill, the whole earth, and every individual of mankind living in the unvaried exercise of these heavenly dispositions: Well may such a state as this be called, as it is frequently in Scripture called, "The reign of Christ on earth." Blessed, blessed state! O that God would hasten it in his time! But, if we be not privileged to behold that day, let us at least seek the commencement of that period in our own souls. Let us seek to resemble Christ as much as possible, and to "have the beauty of the Lord our God" beaming from our own face[a]. This Moses had, by communing with God upon the holy mount; and this we also may have, if we will "*give all diligence*" to attain it. Rise then to the occasion: let your efforts be without intermission: Cry mightily unto God for grace and strength: Plead with him the promises which he has made to you in his Gospel; and "which in Christ Jesus are all yea, and amen." So shall you be enabled to "cleanse yourselves from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit, and to perfect holiness in the fear of God[b]."]

[a] Ps. xc. 17. [b] 2 Cor. vii. 1.

MCLXIX.

MAKING OUR CALLING AND ELECTION SURE.

2 Pet. i. 10, 11. *Brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure; for, if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.*

IN the system of religion which the inspired Penmen have transmitted to us, duty and privilege go hand in hand. It is "the Divine power alone which gives us all things that pertain unto life and godliness:" but we must exert ourselves, in dependence on that power, to "escape the corruption that is in the world through lust." This plain and Scriptural idea

idea gives the true solution to many difficulties that occur in the Sacred Volume, and particularly to those which arise from the words before us.

In the text are set before us,

I. Our duty—

Though all are agreed that our duty is here declared, the opinions of men differ widely respecting the precise nature of that duty. Our first point therefore is to fix the true meaning of the text—

[By our "calling and election," is meant that *effectual* call which men receive when they are truly converted unto God[a], and which both *evinces*, and *results from*, God's eternal purpose to save their souls[b].

Now those who deny the doctrine of election, argue thus. We are commanded to "make our election sure;" and, if we neglect to do so, we may "fall" and perish for ever: *therefore* there is no such thing as is generally understood by "election;" and that which is so called in Scripture, is nothing more than a designation of God to the enjoyment of outward privileges, or an acceptance of us upon certain conditions.

To avoid these consequences, many affirm, that the exhortation in the text means only that we should exert ourselves to get an *assured sense* of our election.

But there is no such ambiguity in the original, as there is in our translation. Whatever the text may prove or disprove, it can have but one meaning; namely, that we are to make our election *firm*, and, by diligence in good works, to *secure* the benefits to which God has elected us.

This however does not disprove the doctrine of election.—The truth is, that God elects us to holiness *as the means*, as well as to glory *as the end*[c]: and that the end can never be secured but by the means prescribed. Though therefore God does elect us unto salvation, we can never partake of that salvation, if we be not found in a diligent exercise of all moral virtues[cc]. And hence St. Paul, notwithstanding he was assured of his final enjoyment of heaven[d], was careful to "keep his body under and bring it into subjection, lest, after having preached to others, he himself should be a castaway[e];" and hence we also are commanded to "look to ourselves, lest we lose the things we have already wrought, and come short of our full reward[f]." The truth lies, not in a simple affirming or denying of the doctrine of election, but in connecting

[a] This is manifest from 1 Cor. i. 26.
[b] 1 Thess. i. 4, 5.
[c] 2 Thess. ii. 13, 14. Eph. i. 4.
[cc] Rom. ii. 7.
[d] 2 Cor. v. 1.
[e] 1 Cor. ix. 27.
[f] 2 John 8. & Heb. iv. 1.

connecting the means with the end, as *the joint objects which God, in his eternal purpose, has determined to accomplish.*]

The meaning of the text being ascertained, the duty contained in it is clear—

[There is a connexion between all the graces of the Spirit: they are so many links in a chain, no one of which can be dispensed with. If we have faith, we must add to it "*valour*," that shall encounter difficulties; "knowledge," that shall regulate the whole of our deportment; "temperance," that shall make us indifferent to the pleasures of sense; "patience," that shall carry us through all hardships; "godliness," that shall fill us with a delight in heavenly things; "brotherly-kindness," that shall knit us to every member of Christ's mystical body; and "charity," that shall engage us in all offices of love even to our very enemies. All of these graces we should cultivate; and, having attained any measure of them, we should seek to grow in them daily; resting in no attainment "till we come to the measure of the full stature of Christ[g]."

In labouring after these things, we shall "make our calling and election sure:" we shall not only *prove* that we have been elected of God, and called by his grace, but shall "strengthen the things that remain," and "*make firm*" the work that has been begun in our souls. Indeed the very pursuit of virtue must in itself tend (in proportion as we are diligent) to keep us from declension[h]: and it is certain, that God will prosper those who conscientiously labour to approve themselves to him[i].]

To aid us in the discharge of our duty, the Apostle sets promises before us for,

II. Our encouragement—

"Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." But more particularly God engages to give his diligent and devoted people,

1. A stedfast life—

[It too often happens that professors of religion are left to dishonour their holy calling by open and scandalous offences: nor have any of us any security against such falls, except as we are upheld in God's everlasting arms. But this security shall be afforded to the zealous and faithful follower of Christ. He will doubtless feel, even to his latest hour, that he is a poor imperfect creature: but he shall be kept from

[g] ver. 5—7. [h] Prov. iii. 21—23. [i] 2 Chron. xv. 2.

from flagrant transgressions; and shall, *in respect of them*, "be preserved blameless unto God's heavenly kingdom." Numberless are the promises of God to this effect[k]——— And O, what encouragement do they afford to those who know their weakness and their frailty! Surely the hope of being enabled to "do all things through the strength of Christ," and of being made "more than conquerors through him that loved us," and of having "our strength in all respects proportioned to our day of trial," may well stimulate us to exertion, and make us diligent in performing every thing which God requireth at our hands[l].]

2. A triumphant death—

[A variety of things may occur to affect the mind of a dying saint, and to prevent him from displaying the full efficacy of his principles in his last hours: but, in the general, the peacefulness of his departure will be proportioned to the integrity and diligence of his life. Indeed, it may be expected by those who "abound in every good word and work," that God will be peculiarly present with them in the time of their greatest need[m]: they may hope to be favoured with Pisgah-views of the heavenly Canaan, and, like Stephen, to behold their Saviour standing ready to receive them. Such was Paul's departure, after a life of unremitting exertion in his Master's cause[n]: and such "an abundant entrance into the kingdom of our Lord shall be ministered to us" also, if we follow the steps of that distinguished Apostle.

Who that has ever seen the insensibility of some, or the terrors of others, would not wish to have this promise fulfilled to him in a dying hour? Let us then live the life of the righteous, if we would die his death. Let us be daily ripening for glory; and we shall in due time be carried to it, "like a shock of corn" to the garner.]

[k] 1 Sam. ii. 9. Ps. xxxvii. 23, 24.
[l] 1 Cor. xv. 58.
[m] Ps. lxxiii. 26.
[n] 2 Tim. iv. 6—8.

MCLXX.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PRACTICAL RELIGION.

2 Pet. i. 12—15. *I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth. Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance; knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath shewed me. Moreover, I will endeavour that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance.*

TO

TO undervalue the principles of the Gospel would be highly sinful: but to forget the ends they are to answer, and the effects they are to produce, would be not a whit less contrary to the mind of God. The restoration of man to the Divine image is the end of all that God has done for us: and the attainment of that image should be the great object of our desire. It is by keeping that in view, that we must glorify God; and by labouring after that, we must grow up into a meetness for our heavenly inheritance. Not any one of the Apostles gloried more in Christ Jesus than did the apostle Peter: but, in the words before us, we see how extremely jealous he was on the subject of personal and universal holiness.

Let us consider,

I. What were the truths which he so constantly laboured to inculcate—

If we look back to the preceding context, we shall find that he has been speaking of the graces which the Christian must exercise in order to approve himself a Christian indeed. And it is in reference to these that he says, "I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of *these things*." Now,

These are things which Christians are but too apt to forget—

[*Principles* are easily retained in memory: but it is not easy to bear in mind all the virtues which we ought to *practise*. When graces are to be brought into action, corruptions rise in the heart, to blind the mind, and to dissipate our thoughts. Grace has a victory to gain, before it can put forth itself so as to display its real excellence. Evil is foremost and uppermost in the mind: and all the propensities of our nature lean to it: and hence a man is carried down the stream before he is aware. A mariner is often driven out of his course by currents without discovering it, till he comes to make his observations: and Christians, through the power of temptation and corruption, are often drawn aside, when they imagine that they are prosecuting the path which God has assigned them. He sometimes mistakes his very faults for virtues: and verily persuades himself that he is serving God aright, when he is acting from a vicious principle, or prosecuting a good object in

in an erroneous manner. To be always aware of the best mode of glorifying God is a very difficult attainment: yea, it is that which we should aspire after; nor should we be ever satisfied, till grace has gained an entire ascendant over the soul, and become to us, as it were, a second nature, easy, uniform, and powerful in its operations.]

Of these things therefore we need to be reminded—

[It is true, that we confess readily the need of universal holiness: yea, so generally is this acknowledged, that we may all be said to "know and be established in this truth." But "though you do know it, and are established in it, I must put you in remembrance of it" again and again. "It is meet and right" that I should remind you of it: for your happiness both in this world and the next depends on your continued and practical remembrance of it. Only look at the preceding declarations of the Apostle, and you will be convinced of this. He tells you, that, if there be in you any allowed want of any of the graces which he had specified, "you are blind, and living in an habitual violation of your baptismal engagements[a]:" and that it is only by abounding in the constant exercise of these graces that you can ever hope for "an abundant entrance into the kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ[b]." Remember this then, I earnestly intreat you. Enter minutely into the consideration of those several graces of which holiness is composed[c]———and set yourselves daily and hourly to the practice of them. St. Peter felt it his duty, "as long as he should be in this tabernacle, to put the primitive Christians in remembrance of these things:" and it cannot but be necessary to remind you of them also: nor can your Minister perform his duty to you aright, without labouring with all his might to inculcate this needful and salutary lesson.]

But let us more particularly inquire,

II. Why he was so anxious to impress them on their minds—

Amongst other reasons which might be mentioned, the following were prominent. He reminded them thus earnestly,

1. Because on their remembrance of these things depended the eternal welfare of their souls—

[Whatever principles they had embraced, they were of no further value than as they were operative upon their souls to the production of universal holiness. By their works they would

[a] ver. 9. [b] ver. 11. [c] ver. 5—7.

would be judged in the last day; and according to them would their eternal destinies be fixed.

And is not this a reason of equal force in relation to you? Yes verily. To this test must you be brought; and by this touchstone must you be tried. Do not imagine that the world's standard of holiness will suffice; or that any part of that which God has required can be dispensed with. God will lay judgment to the line, and righteousness to the plummet, and will scrutinize with unerring accuracy your whole life; and assign to every one of you your portion in heaven or in hell, according as you shall be found to have neglected or fulfilled the duties required of you. Would to God I could impress this upon your minds! I beseech you, Brethren, lay it to heart. It is no new thing that I am bringing to your minds: it is nothing but what you all know and are established in. But alas! alas! how little is it remembered by the generality! and how much do the very best amongst us need to be reminded of it! "I pray God to keep it for ever in the imaginations of the thoughts of your hearts, and to prepare your hearts unto it[d]."]

2. Because he knew that his opportunities of reminding them of these things was drawing to a close—

[The Lord Jesus Christ had told him many years before, that when he should be old, he should be bound and crucified by his enemies[e]. This time was now near at hand: and with such sweet composure did the Apostle contemplate it, that he speaks of it as only the taking down of a tent or tabernacle to rear it again in a better place. But as this would put a termination to his earthly career, he was anxious to improve his few remaining hours in fixing these things upon their minds, "in order that they might have them in remembrance after his decease." He well knew how ready persons were to turn aside from the truths which had been delivered to them. "Joash did that which was right in the sight of the Lord all the days of Jehoiada the priest[f]," but no longer: and Moses had not been removed from the people forty days, before the whole nation of Israel made for themselves, and worshipped, a golden calf.

And is there no reason to fear that you also, my Brethren, will forget the warnings which have been given you, when the tongue that uttered them is silent in the grave? Look at places that have enjoyed the most faithful Ministry, and see what their state is within the space of a few years: how many that were once awakened to some sense of eternal things,

[d] 1 Chron. xxix. 18. [e] John xxi. 18, 19. [f] 2 Chron. xxiv. 2.

things, are gone back again to the world; whilst others have taken refuge in high principles, (of election, and predestination, and the perseverance of the saints,) and are living without any due regard to practical and progressive holiness. Both the one and the other of these are in the utmost danger of perishing in their sins: and I must warn you, whilst I am yet in this tabernacle, that if you relapse into either of these states, it would have been better for you never to have been born: for it would have been better that you had never known any thing of the way of righteousness, than that, after you have known it, you should depart from it.]

3. Because he could not otherwise discharge his duty to them—

[He was well aware of the duties of his office. He knew that, as a watchman, it was his duty to warn them; and that, "if he should neglect to warn them, their blood would be required at his hand." Hence he said, "It is meet," and *just*, and right "for me, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to put you in remembrance:" and if I should cease to do so, *it would be an injustice* to that gracious God, who has committed you to my charge; and to you, who are entitled to this care; and to my own soul, which must endure through all eternity the penalty of that neglect.

And is there not the same cause for *me* also to discharge this part of my office towards you? By dwelling more upon *doctrines*, I might perhaps please you more, because they might tend to lull you asleep in a state of fancied security: whereas by insisting thus on *duties*, and declaring the indispensable necessity of fulfilling them, we keep you in a state of unintermitted vigilance and exertion. But we must "not prophesy unto you smooth things:" we must not "speak peace when there is no peace." God has said, "He that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully:" and it is only "by declaring to you the whole counsel of God that we can be pure from the blood of all men."

Behold then I now remind you of these things. As one who is sensible that he must shortly put off this tabernacle, I would warn you with all fidelity. Holiness is necessary: "without holiness, real and universal holiness, no one of you shall ever see the Lord." Examine then carefully what those graces are which you are to be continually "adding one to another." Search, in which of them you are most defective. Cry with all earnestness to God to give you more grace, and to supply that which is lacking in your spiritual attainments: so shall you "have an abundant entrance into the kingdom of your Lord," and "be the joy and crown of him" who has thus warned you, through eternal ages.]

MCLXXI.

THE TRUTH AND CERTAINTY OF THE GOSPEL.

2 Pet. i. 16. *We have not followed cunningly-devised fables when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

AMONGST the various proofs which we have of the truth and certainty of our holy religion, one of great importance is, that amongst all the authors and founders of it no diversity of sentiment obtained upon any essential point of doctrine: whether the teachers of it were learned, (like the Evangelist Luke and the Apostle Paul,) or unlearned, (like the rest of the Apostles,) they were all of one mind: nor during the whole Apostolic age was there so much as one controversy among them, if we except the doubt that was raised about imposing the yoke of the Mosaic law upon the Gentiles: nor was this question moved by the teachers themselves, but only referred to them by some who were less instructed amongst their converts. This shews, that they were all taught by one and the same Spirit: for it is not to be conceived, that amongst so great a variety of persons, so differently situated, and so differently gifted, there should not have been a considerable diversity of sentiment, sufficient to distract the minds of their hearers, and to cause divisions in the Church. Moreover, we never find one of the inspired Apostles speaking with doubt upon any fundamental point: they knew infallibly, and declared without hesitation, that we are all guilty and helpless in ourselves, all redeemed by the blood of Christ, all renewed by the influences of the holy Spirit, and all to be summoned to the judgment-seat of Christ, to receive according to what we have done in the body, whether it be good or evil. We cannot but be struck with the confidence with which the Apostle Peter speaks in the words before us, and with the simplicity with which that confidence is expressed.

That

That I may place his words in a just point of view, I will endeavour to shew,

I. What he had declared respecting Christ—

The generality of commentators confine "the power and coming" of the Lord Jesus Christ to his future advent to judge the world. But I see no reason for so limiting them: I see nothing in the context that should lead us to such a contracted view of them. I conceive that they include what Christ has done, as well as what he will do; and that the Apostle refers to,

1. The power with which Christ *has* come—

[Both the Epistles of Peter are Catholic, addressed to the whole Church. In the former especially he speaks very fully, and forcibly, of the Lord Jesus Christ, and of the different ends and purposes of his advent. He declares him to have been "fore-ordained before the foundation of the world, but manifest in these last times for his people[a]." He specifies the end of his manifestation, which was, to "redeem his people by his blood," and to bear their sins in his own body on the tree[b]. He declares him to have been "raised up from the dead by the Father; that our faith and hope might be in God[c]:" and he states, that by his "resurrection from the dead he hath begotten us again to a lively hope of an incorruptible and undefiled and never-fading inheritance[d]." He represents him further as "the foundation-stone upon which all his Church and people are built," and which will infallibly support them all for ever and ever[e]. And, lastly, speaks of him as gone into heaven as our forerunner, and as "reigning there above all the principalities and powers" of heaven, earth, and hell[f].

In the epistle that is before us too, he had spoken fully to the same effect, declaring that "grace and peace were to be multiplied unto us through the knowledge of this Saviour[g]," who is the one source and fountain of all good, and has "by his Divine power given us all things that pertain unto life and godliness[h]."

Now these things Peter had declared: and they are no other than what every Minister of Christ must declare. His eternal ordination to his office, his complete execution of it for the salvation of a ruined world, his exaltation to glory, from whence he communicates all blessings to his people, and overrules every thing for their eternal good, this must be made

[a] 1 Pet. i. 20. [b] ib. ver. 18, 19. & ii. 24. [c] 1 Pet. i. 21.
[d] ib. ver. 3, 4. [e] 1 Pet. ii. 5, 6. [f] 1 Pet. iii. 22.
[g] ver. 2. [h] ver. 3.

made known by every Minister of Christ, and must be received by every child of man.]

2. The power with which he *will* come—

[At a future period, that same Jesus, who was crucified, shall appear again "in power and great glory[i]," and will come to "judge both the quick and the dead[k]." Then shall "his glory be fully revealed[l];" and his kingdom be established for ever in the heaven of heavens[m].

These things also the Apostle affirmed. And what less could be declared by any one that has undertaken to preach the Gospel?

If they appear to any to be a cunningly-devised fable, I ask, Why do they appear so? The only answer that can be given is this; That these things are *too great* to be comprehended by us, and *too good* to be expected or believed. They are *great*, no doubt; and they are *good* also, beyond all that any finite intelligence could have conceived. But they are not *on that account* to be questioned. The *creation* of the world out of nothing, as far exceeds our conceptions as the *redemption* of it. Both the one and the other are the offspring of infinite wisdom, and power, and goodness: and, if we were not compelled by the evidence of our senses to acknowledge the wonders of creation, we should be as ready to deny the possibility of them, as we are to question the wonders of redemption. But the Apostle declares, that even these latter had, as far as they could be, been made objects of sense; and every evidence of them that could be submitted to the senses had been given to him.]

In confirmation of this the Apostle proceeds to state,

II. On what assured grounds he was enabled to bear his testimony respecting him—

The Apostle had all the evidence respecting the Messiahship of Jesus that was possessed by the Church at large. He had beheld all the miracles that Jesus wrought, and heard all his discourses, and seen his bright example, and witnessed his resurrection and ascension, and had received from him the Holy Ghost according to his promise on the day of Pentecost; and had beheld also the triumphs of the Gospel over all the power and policy of earth and hell. (Of the prophecies which he had seen fulfilled in

[i] 1 Pet. i. 7. [k] 1 Pet. iv. 5. [l] ib. ver. 13. [m] ver. 11.

in him, we shall have occasion hereafter to speak.) But in addition to all these, he himself possessed an evidence which had made the deepest impression on his own mind, an evidence, which no other human being, except James and John, was ever permitted to behold, and which he could not forbear to adduce on this occasion in confirmation of all that he had stated[n].

He had received the evidence of his senses respecting the power and coming of the Lord Jesus—

[He with James and John had been taken up to Mount Tabor by his divine Master, who had there been transfigured before them[o]. On that occasion the bright effulgence of the Deity had been made to shine forth in the person of the Lord Jesus, whose "face was as bright as the meridian sun, and whose raiment was as white as the light," "whiter far than any fuller on earth could make them[p]." This bright effulgence Peter had seen with his bodily eyes.

On that occasion too Moses had been raised from the dead, and Elijah brought down from heaven, to bear their testimony to him. These two persons represented the law and the prophets, both of which had their full accomplishment in him: and they now, as it were, surrendered up their respective offices to him, who was henceforth to be the great Prophet, Priest, and King of his Church and people. Of this also Peter had been "an eye witness."

But, in addition to this, God the Father had borne witness to his Son by an audible voice from heaven, saying, "This is that my beloved son in whom I am well pleased: Hear ye him[q]." In these words there was a direct reference to what God had before said to Moses, "A Prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren like unto thee: him shall ye hear: and whosoever will not hear that Prophet, I will require it of him[r]." This voice declared, that that very Jesus was the Prophet so referred to, and the Prophet whom all must obey at the peril of their souls. And this voice Peter distinctly heard.]

This evidence fully confirmed all that he had asserted respecting Christ—

[He had declared that Jesus Christ was the only begotten son of God, "the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person[s]," and of this, as far as it was possible,

[n] ver. 17, 18. [o] Matt. xvii. 1—5. [p] Mark ix. 3.
[q] This is the force of the article in Matt. xvii. 5.
[r] Deut. xviii. 18, 19. [s] Heb. i. 3.

possible, he had been an eye, and ear witness. He had declared the sufficiency of his death for the redemption of the whole world: and how could he doubt this when God had audibly proclaimed his acquiescence in it in that view? He had declared, that the salvation or condemnation of every living man would depend on his acceptance or rejection of this Saviour, who was the one Prophet, whom all must hear; the one Priest, in whom all must trust; and the one King, whom all must obey: and so strongly were these truths assured to him by all that he had seen and heard, that he could not doubt of them one moment, or hesitate to appeal to them, in proof that "he had not followed any cunningly-devised fable," as ignorant Gentiles, or superstitious Jews, were wont to do. And to these things do *we* also make *our* appeal: for in these things the three Apostles could not be deceived: and their whole life and death shewed clearly enough, that they had no design or wish to deceive.]

APPLICATION—

1. Let not any of you then be moved by the impious and blasphemous attempts which are made to undermine the Gospel—

[You may see in my text the construction which infidels and blasphemers are wont to put upon the truths of revelation: they pour contempt upon them as "cunningly-devised fables," invented and propagated by designing priests for the advancement of their own interests. But who could ever disprove the truth and authority either of the Old or New Testament? It is easy enough to sneer and cavil at any thing: and impious scoffers ever have treated in this way the truths of revelation, even from the days of Jannes and Jambres, who withstood Moses[t], to the present hour[u]. "Men of corrupt minds, and reprobate concerning the truth," ever have, and ever will, "sport in this manner with their own deceivings[x]." But, beloved, search the Scriptures for yourselves: examine the evidences which have been adduced in proof of their divine authority: see the suitableness of the provision which has been made for you by Almighty God in the person and work of his only begotten Son: and you will soon see, that the great mystery of redemption carries its own evidence along with it, and that what is spoken in Scripture respecting it, is "a faithful saying," and worthy of all acceptation"———]

2. Let

[t] 2 Tim. iii. 8.

[u] February 1820, just after the trial and condemnation of Carlile.

[x] Compare 2 Tim. iii. 8. with 2 Pet. ii. 10—13. & iii. 3, 4.

2. Let all of you get an experimental acquaintance with the Gospel in your own souls—

[Peter believed the evidences which he had in common with others: but he felt peculiar conviction from those which he derived from his own personal experience. So the people of Samaria, who had believed on Jesus on account of the woman's testimony, told her afterwards, "Now we believe, not because of thy saying; for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world[y]." Thus do you seek, if not the evidences of *your senses*, yet the evidence of *your own experience*; for it is certain, that "he who truly believeth in Christ, *hath the witness* in himself[z]:" he knows the power and grace of Christ in a way that he never could know it from mere argument: and in speaking of Christ he can say, "What my eyes have seen, my ears have heard, my hands have handled of the word of life, that declare I unto you[a]." There are "spiritual senses which may be exercised;" and though their testimony is not satisfactory to others, it is peculiarly convincing to those who possess it. For the good of others then I say, Seek an acquaintance with the established evidences of the Gospel: but for your own good I say, Go up to Jesus upon the Holy Mount, and there hear and see what God will reveal for the conviction and consolation of your souls. So shall you have an evidence which nothing can shake, and feel yourselves standing on a rock, which defies the assaults both of earth and hell.]

[y] John iv. 42. [z] 1 John v. 10. [a] 1 John i. 1.

MCLXXII.

THE TESTIMONY OF PROPHECY.

2 Pet. i. 19. *We have also a more sure word of prophecy, whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day-star arise in your hearts.*

THAT persons ignorant of the grounds on which Christianity is established should doubt the truth of it, ought not to occasion us any surprise: for it must be confessed, that on a superficial view of the leading points contained in it, it does appear to surpass the bounds of credibility. That the God of heaven and earth should assume our nature, and be made in the likeness of sinful flesh; that he should thus humble himself, in order that he might in his own person bear,

and expiate, the sins of his rebellious creatures; that, having wrought out in our nature a perfect righteousness, he should offer that righteousness to all who will believe in him, and accept it in their behalf for the justification of their souls before him; there is in all this something so wonderful, so glorious, so delightful, that it does indeed appear like "a cunningly-devised fable;" and one is tempted to say concerning it, as Job did under a similar impression of the manifold grace of God, "If I had called to God, and he had answered me, (and told me by an audible voice from heaven that Christianity was true,) yet would I not believe that he hearkened to my voice[a]." As Peter, when actually liberated from prison, "wist not that it was true, but thought he saw a vision," so, when we have the actual experience of the Gospel salvation in our own souls, it actually seems at times to be "a dream[b]." But it is no dream, no cunningly-devised fable; but a glorious reality. Of this the Apostle was well assured. He had received the most positive evidence of it from his own senses. He had seen his Lord transfigured upon the Holy Mount: and had heard the testimony which the Father had borne to him by an audible voice from heaven; "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased[c]." But, however satisfactory this evidence was to him, it could not be so convincing to others, because it depended solely on the testimony of himself and the other two Apostles who were admitted to that sight, and because the inferences which he drew from what he had seen and heard would not commend themselves with the same force to others as they did to him. But there were other grounds on which all might feel the same assurance as he himself did. There was "a more sure word of prophecy," which every one might examine for himself, and of which every one who did examine it was competent to judge. This no man could weigh without being convinced by it: he might as well doubt his own existence,

[a] Job. ix. 16. [b] Ps. cxxvi. 1. [c] ver. 16—18.

istence, as doubt the truth of Christianity, if only he examined the prophecies with a candid mind.

It is my intention to shew you;

I. The evidence of our religion as founded on prophecy—

Verily it is "a sure word," that may well be depended on. Consider the vast collective body of prophecies: consider,

1. Their fulness—

[There is not any one point relating to Christianity that has not been the subject of prophecy. Every thing relating to Christ, his person, his work, his offices; his life, his death, his resurrection and ascension; his investiture with all power at the right hand of God; the nature, extent, and duration of his kingdom; and his second coming to judge the world; all has been fully and distinctly declared by holy men of God, who spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. Now I ask, Would any one have ventured to predict so many things respecting an impostor? Supposing that the dangerous ground of prophecy had been taken by any who conspired to deceive the world, would they not for their own sake have been satisfied with a few general predictions, that were capable of different interpretations, and that were likely in the common course of events to happen? Would any persons have undertaken to give beforehand so full, so large, so complicated a disclosure of all that should come to pass? But add to this,]

2. Their minuteness—

[It is surprising that prophecy should condescend to such minute occurrences as were actually foretold concerning Christ. Not only were the time and place of his nativity foretold, but his expulsion from thence to Egypt, and his subsequent abode at Nazareth. So again, not only was the manner of his death declared, but such minute circumstances as could not be conceived; such as the very words which his enemies should taunt him with, whilst yet he should hang upon the cross; and their offering him vinegar to drink; and even the manner in which they should dispose of his raiment, casting lots for one part, whilst they divided the rest. Now I ask, Could any but the omniscient God predict such things as these? things, which could not be fulfilled by any except by the very enemies who put him to death as an impostor?

But the evidence, as arising from the fulness and minuteness of the prophecies, will derive great strength from marking,]

3. Their

3. Their consistency—

[Certainly, when we consider that the prophecies were delivered by different persons wholly unconnected with each other, at distant times and places, during the space of 3600 years, and that the things which they predicted were in appearance so opposite to each other; it is inconceivable, that no inconsistency should be found in any of them, if they were not inspired by the omniscient and unchangeable God.

Let us enter a little into this point.—*The person* of the Messiah. He must be "Jehovah's fellow," "the mighty God," and yet "a man," yea "a worm, and no man, the very scorn of men and the outcast of the people." He must be "the Root and yet the Offspring of David," "David's Son, and yet David's Lord." He must be "a Lion," and yet "a Lamb." He must be a King, a Priest, and a Prophet, all in one. He must die, yet live. Though a Jew, he must die a Roman death, and yet not experience the same treatment as was shewn to those who were crucified with him, in having his bones broken: yea, he shall "be pierced in his hands and feet," where the bones are so numerous, and by the soldier's spear also, and yet "not have a bone broken." He shall die as a malefactor, and yet "have his grave with the rich." He shall suffer thus under the hand of his enemies, and yet triumph; yea, and triumph by dying, and pass through the grave to his throne of glory; and, after standing at the tribunal of his rebellious creatures, summon the universe to his tribunal, and fix the everlasting doom of men and angels. Say, whether such apparent inconsistencies would ever have been predicted respecting an impostor, or, if predicted, would have been ever realized and fulfilled? There are, it is true, many prophecies which are not yet fulfilled. The restoration of the Jews, the conversion of the Gentiles, the universal establishment of Christ's kingdom upon earth; these things have not yet taken place: nor have the prophecies taught us to expect that they should yet be accomplished. But the fulfilment of such diversified predictions which we have already seen, leaves us no doubt respecting the accomplishment of the remainder in due season: and this is one reason why the evidence from prophecy is so convincing; that it is ever growing stronger and stronger by the augmented and ever-increasing force which it receives, from the events which are yet daily taking place in the Church and in the world.]

This then may suffice for the first point which we were to consider, namely, the evidence of our religion as founded on prophecy. We now proceed to shew,

II. The

II. The use which we should make of that evidence—

"We should take heed to it," and consider it well;

1. To satisfy our minds respecting the Messiahship of Jesus—

[In the world at large we have nothing to guide us in relation to this point: and even from Judaism we gain but little light. The whole Mosaic dispensation was dark and shadowy: and the very predictions which were handed down to us by successive prophets were so dark, that they were not understood by the very persons who uttered them[d]. But these prophecies serve us for a light, which, duly improved, will infallibly lead us to the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. We may illustrate this by the star which appeared to the Magi in the East, which first of all directed them to Judæa, then to Jerusalem, the Capital of Judæa. There, they made inquiries respecting "the person who was born King of the Jews." There, they learned that Bethlehem was to be the place of the Messiah's nativity: and *Herod was the person who directed them to go to Bethlehem*. But, when they were going thither, the star which they had before seen in the East went before them, and stood over the very house in which the infant was. So will prophecy guide us. At first we are informed, that "the seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head:" but where or when to find him we know not. Next we find, that he shall be of the seed of Abraham; and in the particular line of Isaac, and of Jacob. Proceeding further, we are directed to the family of David; and are told that he shall come whilst the second temple is yet standing, and be born at Bethlehem. Then we come to all the minute particulars respecting him. He must have such a forerunner as Elijah: He must have the Holy Ghost descend upon him: He must work unnumbered miracles in confirmation of his word: He must be scourged, and yet crucified; (though his scourging was inflicted by Pilate in order to prevent his crucifixion). A thousand minute circumstances must attend his death: and on the third day he must rise again; and ascend to heaven, and send down the Holy Ghost upon his disciples, and enable them to speak all manner of languages, and work all manner of miracles: and, by their instrumentality, he must so establish his kingdom in the world, that the gates of hell shall never prevail against it. Now, where shall I find the person in whom all these, and ten thousand other predictions, meet? I go to one and to another; but I am stopped in a moment: I do not find in them any two requisites. I then come to Jesus; and I find, He answers the

[d] 1 Pet. i. 10—12.

the description in *some* particulars. I then follow him to see if other things concur to point him out: and, the more minutely I examine, the more evidence I gain, without one single disappointment. As the lot for the discovery of Achan fell first on the tribe, then on the family, then on the household, and then on the individual; so does every prophecy lead me nearer and nearer unto Jesus, till they fix infallibly on him as the object of my pursuit. Thus, I say, I take prophecy for my light; and I follow it, till it stands over the very person of my adorable Lord, and leaves me no possibility of doubt respecting his being the true Messiah, the Saviour of the world.]

2. To lead us to an experimental sense of his excellency and glory—

[We must not be satisfied with knowing that Jesus is the Messiah, but must seek to experience all the blessings of his salvation in our souls. Suppose a condemned criminal to receive a pardon from his prince, and at the same time a grant of large estates, and a title to all the highest honours of his kingdom; and the man were to satisfy himself with examining and ascertaining that the writing which conveyed to him these benefits, was not a forgery: what should we say of that man? Should we think him sane? Should we not expect that, as a rational being, he would leave his prison, and go forth to possess his estates and honours? Yet this is the very folly which we are guilty of. We are contented with ascertaining to our satisfaction the Messiahship of Jesus, and go not forth to him to obtain the blessings he has purchased for us. But let us remember, that a lamp is only to guide us through a dark place: when the day has dawned and the sun is risen, we are then to walk in the light of that sun, which will supersede the use of the glimmering taper we have just employed. Now thus it is that the Lord Jesus Christ, "the true Morning-star[e]," "the Sun of Righteousness[f]," will arise in our hearts, and "will manifest himself to us, as he does not unto the world[g]." And, as light is its own evidence, so will he bring his own evidence, along with him, and prove himself to be the Messiah by the blessings he imparts. Only let that "God, who commanded light to shine out of darkness, shine into our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ[h]," and we shall have the same evidence of his Messiahship as a man has of the sun's existence when he is basking in the beams of its meridian splendour. This then is what we must seek. We must seek to have "the day dawn, and the day-star arise in our hearts:" and

[e] Rev. xxii. 16.
[f] Mal. iv. 2.
[g] John xiv. 22.
[h] 2 Cor. iv. 6.

and then we shall be able to say to prophecy, as the Samaritans did to the woman who had guided them to Jesus, "Now we believe, not because of thy saying; for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world[i]." It is said of heaven, that "the glory of God doth lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof[k]:" and thus may it be said of us when Christ has once revealed himself within us; so bright, so cheering, so glorious will be his presence in the soul!]

We may LEARN then from hence,

1. The propriety of considering the evidences of our religion—

[Were we habituated from our early youth to consider these things, how vain and impotent would be the efforts of Infidels to shake our faith! If we regarded nothing but intellectual amusement, we can scarcely conceive a richer feast to the mind than the study of prophecy. But, when we reflect that on the truth of Christianity our eternal welfare depends, it is surprising that we are not more interested about this all-important subject. We should not be satisfied with believing Christianity, because our fathers have believed it: we should examine for ourselves. We should search the Old Testament Scriptures, which testify of Christ; and compare them with the New Testament, in which the fulfilment of the prophecies is recorded. Thus should we examine the foundation upon which we propose to build, and assure ourselves that it will bear the edifice which we design to construct upon it.]

2. The folly of resting in them—

[A man who lays a foundation proceeds to build upon it. And so must we do. We have ascertained beyond a doubt that Jesus is the Christ. But what does the assurance of that fact avail us, if we go not to him for the salvation which he has purchased for us? The Israelites, when they found the manna that was round about their tents, inquired, "What is it?" But when they had ascertained that it was a species of bread given them from heaven, were they satisfied with having learned that fact? No: they proceeded to gather it, each one for himself, and then to feed upon it from day to day. Do ye then so in reference to Christ, who is "the true bread from heaven." Do not imagine, that because you know he has been given, and are acquainted also with the ends and purposes for which he has been given, you will receive any benefit from that. You must lay hold upon him, and feed upon

[i] John iv. 42. [k] Rev. xxi. 23.

upon him from day to day. If he be indeed, as he has declared, the Light of the world, you must walk in his light. Then shall your path to heaven be clear, and your way delightful: and then shall you be prepared to dwell with him in that place, where the sun shall be no more your light by day, neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto you, but where the Lord shall be unto you an everlasting light, and your God your glory[1]."]

[1] Isai. lx. 19.

MCLXXIII.

GOD THE PUNISHER OF SIN, AND PRESERVER OF HIS PEOPLE.

2 Peter ii. 4—9. *If God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment; and spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly, and turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them with an overthrow, making them an example unto those that after should live ungodly: and delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked; (for that righteous man dwelling amongst them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds:) the Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the ungodly unto the day of judgment to be punished.*

THERE were in the Apostles' days a set of religious professors, such as, I would fondly hope, scarcely exist at this time. If we take the chapter before us, and the Epistle of St. Jude, and mark the characters which are there portrayed, we shall not know where to look for persons of a similar description: or, if we find a few, they are so few and so insignificant, that they have no influence whatever in the Church. If they were at all numerous, we should not wonder that "the way of truth should be evil spoken of[a]." But what has been, may be: and, if we be not alive to the dangers of an Antinomian spirit, we may yet see "false teachers amongst us, privily bringing in their damnable heresies, and denying

[a] ver. 2.

denying the Lord that bought them, and bringing both on themselves and their followers a swift destruction[b]." One of the most fearful and disgusting traits of such characters is, the boldness and confidence with which they propagate their errors; professing to expect for themselves, and promising to others, impunity in "their pernicious ways." But, whatever they may dream of in relation to their security, "their judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not[c]." In confirmation of this truth, the Apostle adduces many striking examples, which attest, that God will put a difference between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve him and those who serve him not.

The truths deduced from these records will form the ground-work of our present discourse:

I. God knows how to punish impenitent transgressors—

He has inflicted terrible judgments on account of sin—

[*Angels in heaven* have experienced his wrath. Respecting the fall of the angels we know but little. But this we know: There were a countless multitude of angels, once as holy and as happy as any that are now around the throne of God; but, on some temptation, they fell, and "left their first estate" of holy obedience, and for their wickedness were cast down from heaven, into a place of inconceivable horror and misery created on purpose for their reception, where they are "reserved in chains of darkness unto the judgment of the great day." Their sin will in that day be made known before the whole assembly of men and angels, and the justice of God in their punishment be universally acknowledged. Their misery is not yet complete. God has seen fit to give them somewhat of a respite, as it were, till the counsels of God respecting the redemption of the world shall be completely fulfilled: but then, together with the ungodly from amongst our fallen race, they shall receive their final doom. They are indeed yet continually adding to their former impiety, by labouring with all their might to frustrate the counsels of heaven in the salvation of mankind: and thus are they treasuring up continually an augmented weight of wrath, which at the appointed season shall come upon them to the uttermost.

On

[b] ver. 1. [c] ver. 3.

On men too, even on *the whole world*, has God inflicted vengeance on account of sin. Scarcely had the world existed 1500 years, before wickedness abounded in it to such a degree, that "God repented that he had made man." On this account, he determined to destroy the world: and for that purpose he sent a deluge, which soon covered the face of the whole world, and overwhelmed every living thing, with the exception of those which, with Noah and his family, were assembled in the ark.

Another instance of God's displeasure against sin has been manifested in *the destruction of Sodom and the cities of the plain*. Grievous beyond measure, and beyond sufferance, was the iniquity of those cities. Yet, if only ten righteous persons had been found in them, God would have spared the whole for their sake. But there being one only, he rained down fire and brimstone upon them from heaven, and reduced them all to ashes, making them a terrible example to the whole world, of the vengeance that should overtake all who should thereafter live ungodly.]

From these instances it is undeniably clear, that he both can, and will, inflict judgments on sin and sinners—

[Here are *facts;* facts, which cannot be denied; facts, which bear upon them the stamp and character of Divine agency; facts, which speak so loudly, that we cannot shut our ears against them.

There are doubts on the minds of men: Can God, or will he, execute his threatenings, when, if he should proceed according to his word, so many will be destroyed? Shall the great and noble be of no more account in his eyes than the meanest of mankind? or, if some notice shall be taken of sin, shall it be so severe as we are taught to expect? Look, Brethren, into the Divine Records, and all these doubts shall vanish in an instant. Angels confessedly are a far more exalted race of Beings than men: yet not even angels were spared, when once they had sinned against their God; but were cast headlong from heaven into the bottomless abyss of hell. But will God proceed against so many? Look to the old world, where not a human being, except Noah and his family, was saved. But shall it indeed be so terrible? Look at the cities of the plain, and see what terrible destruction was brought on them: and bear in mind, that these very judgments were intended "for an example unto them that should thereafter live ungodly." Look, I say, at these things; and then doubt whether that judgment which is threatened shall be executed; "God will rain down upon the wicked snares, fire and brimstone, storm

storm and tempest; this shall be their portion to drink[d]." If, after seeing such proofs of the Divine veracity, we will not believe, we shall be constrained to believe when our own bitter experience shall leave no room for a possibility of doubt. The judgments may be delayed, even as the deluge was: but at the appointed season the vengeance shall come, and shall not tarry.]

But from the fore-mentioned dispensations we are taught, that,

II. He knows also how to deliver and to save his tempted people—

Wonderfully did God interpose in behalf of Noah and of Lot—

[Noah was a righteous man, and "a preacher of righteousness" to others. For the space of one hundred and twenty years he ceased not to warn and to exhort the world around him: but in all that time we read not of one, whom he was the means of converting unto God. He however maintained his stedfastness amidst all the aboundings of iniquity: and God instructed him how to build an ark, for the saving of himself and his household. Of his family there were seven given to him; and he was "the eighth;" not the eighth lineal descendant from Adam; (for he was *the tenth*;) but one of eight, or the eighth of those who were saved in the ark. Besides him and those embarked in the same vessel with him, not a creature upon earth was saved: but he was brought forth to the new world in perfect safety.

Nor was the deliverance of Lot less wonderful. He also was "a righteous man:" and his piety was made evident, by the deep interest which he took in the welfare of his fellow-citizens, and by the grief with which the iniquities of all around him oppressed his soul. And, till this righteous man was placed beyond the reach of harm, God himself could not proceed to execute his threatened vengeance. Two angels were sent from heaven to bring him forth, and by a holy violence, as it were, to urge him forward, that he might not be overwhelmed by the impending storm.]

And is he less concerned about his people now?—

[Your temptations and trials may be such as no human wisdom could foresee or avoid. But such were the calamities from which Lot and Noah were delivered. You may be a poor despised creature, derided as an enthusiast by all around you, and accounted either conceited or mad, on account of your hope and confidence in God: but such was the light in

[d] Ps. xi. 6.

in which those holy men were viewed by their contemporaries; yet they were dear to God, and were saved by him with a great and glorious salvation: and so shall you be saved also from your trials, whether they regard your temporal or your eternal welfare: nor shall so much as one thing occur, which shall not be ultimately over-ruled for your good.]

Express ye then your faith in God as they did—

[*Fear to offend him.* No doubt those holy men were sorely tempted at times to yield to the solicitations, and to comply with the practices, of those around them. But they maintained their integrity, and walked before God in all good conscience in the midst of all the abominations that surrounded them. So then do ye: let your one concern be to serve and please him. Never forget that God is a holy God, and that he will punish iniquity: and "though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished." Walk uprightly before him; and none can hurt you: but give way to sin; and none can deliver you.

Learn also to trust him. Neither Noah nor Lot had any human help. They trusted in God: and he was all-sufficient for them. Confide ye then in God, as they did. Bear in mind, that he is Almighty to effect whatever will conduce to your welfare; and that he is faithful to all his promises; not one jot or tittle of which shall ever fail.

Finally, *dare to serve him.* "Fear ye not the reproach of man, neither be afraid of his revilings: for the moth shall eat him up." What if, through the aboundings of iniquity you be as singular as Noah was in the old world, or Lot in Sodom? it is not your fault, but the fault of those who will not serve God. Let the world deride your *fears:* they will ere long see who was right; they who mocked at the impending judgments, or you who sought to escape them. Let them deride your *hopes:* the time is quickly coming, when they will wish that they also had entered into the ark, or fled to the mountain appointed for their abode. Be content to be derided now; in certain expectation, that God will ere long "appear to their shame, but to your unspeakable and everlasting joy." Whilst they are laughing at you, or sleeping in their sins, "their judgment lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not." And, whilst you are faithfully adhering to the service of your God, "the mansions in heaven are preparing for you; and your Lord will quickly come to take you to the possession of them."]

MCLXXIV.

APOSTATES IN A WORSE STATE THAN EVER.

2 Pet. ii. 20, 21. *If after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again intangled therein and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning: for it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them.*

THAT persons inspired with the love of God should endeavour to bring their fellow-creatures to the knowledge of him, and to a participation of the blessings which they themselves enjoy, seems easy to be accounted for; because nothing but good can result from their labours: but that men should be active in proselyting to impiety those who are walking uprightly before God, appears almost incredible; because no good whatever can issue from their exertions. Were we to see a bond-slave labouring with anxiety to reduce to the same situation with himself those who were enjoying the sweets of liberty; we should account it strange. Yet is the zeal of many exercised for this very end, whilst they strive to reduce to the bondage of corruption their brethren, who through grace have been delivered from it. In the Apostles' days, some professed to have been favoured with sublimer views of the Christian system than others; and to have juster notions respecting the nature and extent of Christian liberty: and by "speaking great swelling words of vanity, they allured, through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness, many who had clean escaped from those who lived in error:" thus, under the semblance of Ministers of righteousness, promoting most effectually the interests of Satan's kingdom. And such "false Apostles" will be found in every age, "deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the Apostles of Christ[a]," and ruining the souls whose welfare they profess to seek. That this is the sad effect of their labours, the Apostle does not scruple to

[a] 2 Cor. xi. 13—15.

to affirm: he even declares, that the persons so deceived by them are brought into a worse condition than they were in previous to their first acquaintance with the Gospel salvation.

In this statement of the Apostle we have,

I. A case supposed—

The case which he supposes is simply this; That a man may have attained the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, so as to see, that salvation is by him alone, even by his blood which he shed for our fallen race, and his righteousness which he wrought out for their acceptance with God. Further, he supposes that a man may have experienced a considerable efficacy from this knowledge, so as to have been sanctified, in some degree, by means of it, and delivered from the pollutions of a sinful world. Thus he may practically and experimentally "have known the way of righteousness, and yet be again so entangled with the world as to be overcome by it;" and be so overcome by it as "to turn away finally and for ever from the holy commandment delivered unto him."

Now this case may well be supposed—

[Consider *how extremely weak our nature is*; how incapable we are of doing any thing that is good, or of resisting any thing that is evil, any farther than as we are strengthened by the grace of God. As it is of God alone in the first instance that we are enabled "either to will or to do" what is right[b]; so is it by the continued operation of his grace alone that we can hold on in the right way: "without Christ" continually assisting us, "we can do nothing[c]."

Consider also *to what innumerable temptations we are exposed.* There is not any thing, however innocent in itself, which may not prove to us an occasion of sin. Our food, our raiment, our connexions in life, may all be inordinately loved, or in some way be employed to ensnare our souls. Wherever we go, and whatever we do, we are exposed to temptations of different kinds; nor can any man living tell what a single hour may bring forth, or what a change may, through the influence of some unforeseen temptation, be speedily wrought in his moral or religious character.

Consider

[b] Phil. ii. 13. [c] John xv. 5.

Consider farther, *what both Scripture and experience teach us on this very subject.* Do not the Scriptures tell us, that many had already "made shipwreck both of faith and a good conscience[d]," and that in the latter times such defections would be very numerous[e]? St. Paul's expostulation with some of the Galatian Church deserves particular notice in this point of view: "Now, *after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God*, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage? I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed on *you* labour in vain[f]." Why are we so often and so urgently cautioned against "being moved away from the hope of the Gospel," and "falling from our own stedfastness," if no such instance could occur? Is the case of Demas no warning to us? And have we not ourselves either known, or heard of, many, who, like him, "after running well for a season, have been hindered," and, like Lot's wife, become monuments and warnings to all around them? Are the stony-ground-hearers, and the thorny-ground so rare in the Church, that there is no foundation for the supposition in our text?]

To attempt to invalidate the supposition by an appeal to human systems, is highly inexpedient—

[We never can sufficiently deplore the use which is made of human systems. Men will attach themselves to some fallible creature like themselves, and so adopt his sentiments, as to reject even the Scripture itself, when its declarations militate against their favourite opinions. There are in the Church of God not a few, who would shut their ears against a faithful exposition of our text, as much as they would against blasphemy itself; because they cannot reconcile the leading sentiment contained in it with the dogmas of their party. But who are we that we are to sit in judgment upon the Sacred Records, and to wrest from its obvious meaning every sentence which does not accord with our views? That there is no real contradiction between the supposition in our text, and many declarations in Scripture which have an opposite aspect, we could easily shew, if it would not draw us too far from our subject: but suffice it to say, that many assertions, which are erroneously *thought opposite* to each other, have in reality a subverviency the one to the other, and, like wheels moving in an opposite direction, concur to the production of one common end. I therefore intreat you, Brethren, not to attempt to weaken the force of the supposition in my text, by an appeal to human systems; but to admit it as a salutary caution to yourselves, and to improve it with all diligence, that you yourselves

[d] 1 Tim. i. 19. [e] 1 Tim. iv. 1. [f] Gal. iv. 9, 11.

selves may not become examples of the case that is supposed.]

Admitting then the possibility of the case supposed, let me draw your attention to,

II. The evil of it declared—

Wherever such a case occurs, the man is indeed in a most pitiable condition: "His last end is worse than his beginning." Yes verily, he is in a worse state than ever,

1. In respect of guilt—

[The more light a man has in his mind, the more he sins if he resist that light. Now in the case under our consideration, the person is supposed to have obtained "a knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and such a measure of it as has been attended with the happiest effects; and yet, after knowing the way of righteousness, to depart from it." Here then he must sin against light and knowledge: he must violate the dictates of his own conscience: for, though it is true enough, that a man may persuade himself that he is acting right, whilst yet he is violating the plainest commands of God, he cannot experience a transition from the service of God to the service of Satan without many rebukes from conscience, and strong misgivings in his mind. And every step he takes in such a state exceedingly augments and aggravates his guilt: insomuch that the sins, which he committed in his days of ignorance, have no guilt in comparison of that which he now contracts. What our blessed Lord said to the Jews of old is strictly applicable to him: "If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloak for their sin[g]." If to this be added, that in departing from the ways of righteousness he in a tenfold degree dishonours God, and brings disgrace upon his Gospel, and weakens the hands of the godly, and hardens the hearts of the ungodly, the sin of an Apostate is great indeed.]

2. In respect of bondage—

[The Spirit of God strives more or less with every living man[h]: but with those who have experienced the sanctifying effects of the knowledge of Christ, he must of necessity have wrought in a more abundant measure. Consequently, by the increased resistance necessary to overcome his sacred motions, he must have been the more deeply "grieved[i]." And when once "the Spirit is quenched[k]," and caused "to depart[l]," and is so "vexed" as to become an "enemy[m]" to the backslidden soul,

[g] John xv. 22. [h] Gen. vi. 3. [i] Eph. iv. 30.
[k] 1 Thess. v. 19. [l] Hos. ix. 12. [m] Isai. lxiii. 10.

soul, What can be expected but that Satan should re-occupy the post from which he had been driven, and bind in stronger chains than ever his unhappy captive? This our blessed Lord has taught us to expect. He says, that Satan, under such circumstances, "will bring with him seven other spirits more wicked, if possible, than himself; and they will enter into the backslider's heart, and dwell there: and that the last state of that man will be worse that the first[n]." The heart of the Apostate must of necessity become more hardened in proportion as he has "rebelled against the light," and provoked God to give him up to his own heart's lusts. Hence the Apostle speaks of it as "*impossible* to renew such an one to repentance[o]." By this I understand, not that it is *absolutely* impossible, but so difficult as to be beyond all reasonable expectation.]

3. In respect of condemnation—

[If guilt be increased, an increase of punishment must follow of course. "The servant that knows his lord's will and does it not, will be beaten with many stripes;" whilst he who sins through ignorance will be beaten with comparatively "few stripes[p]." Hence our Lord declared to the cities of Bethsaida and Capernaum, that it should be "more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrha in the day of judgment than for them[q]:" for though their wickedness was not of the precise nature with that which so abounded in Sodom, yet it was committed in the midst of advantages which Sodom and Gomorrha never enjoyed. The same may be said of the Apostate: "If we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour us." And this judgment will be proportioned to the guilt which we have contracted by our abuse of our pre-eminent advantages: for (it is added), "He that despised Moses' law died without mercy, under two or three witnesses. Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the Covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and *hath done despite unto the Spirit of Grace*[r]?"

From all these considerations it is clear, that the last state of the Apostate is worse than his beginning: and that it would have "been better for him never to have known the way of righteousness, than, after he has known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto him."]

APPLI-

[n] Matt. xii. 43—45. [o] Heb. vi. 4—6. [p] Luke xii. 47, 48.
[q] Matt. x. 15. [r] Heb. x. 26—29.

APPLICATION—

There are, it is to be feared, *many* here present, who have never yet been delivered from the pollutions of the world.

[In truth, of this description are the great mass of nominal Christians throughout the world. If you take men's victory over the world as a criterion whereby to judge of their piety, you will find amongst the Professors of Christianity quite as little as amongst Jews, or Mahometans, or Pagans. The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, that is, pleasure, and riches, and honour, are the great objects of ambition in every place: and, if a man be dead to them, he is "a sign and a wonder" to all around him. Look, Beloved Brethren, and see how your hearts stand affected to these things. Can you truly say, as before God, that "you have overcome the world," and that it is, as it were, under your feet? Have you ever had such views of "the Cross of Christ, as have rendered the world and all its vanities like a crucified object in your eyes; and that you also are become like one crucified unto it[s]?" I intreat you to attend to what the Apostle speaks in my text: "If after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." *He here takes for granted*, that this effect will follow, universally, and invariably, follow. I pray you to mark this: *The Apostle takes it for granted:* and he was right; for there never was, nor ever will be, one exception to this truth: *All who know Christ aright, will become dead to the world, and escape from its pollutions.* Bring yourselves then to this test: Try yourselves, ye whose friends and companions are worldly, whose desires and pursuits are worldly, whose joys and sorrows are worldly. If you were Christians indeed, you would "not be of the world, even as Christ was not of the world[t]." You cannot be of the world, and of God too; for they stand in direct opposition to each other[u]. "You cannot serve God and Mammon[x]." Know then, that, whilst you love and "*mind* earthly things[y]," you have never yet "known the way of righteousness[z]: and that, though your state may be "*worse*," it is exceeding *bad*: for, if "the last end of the Apostate is *worse* than his beginning," his beginning must of necessity be *bad*: and such is the state of all who have not yet devoted themselves to the service of their God.]

But *some* there are, we may hope, who have, through the

[s] Gal. vi. 14. [t] John xvii. 16. [u] 1 John iv. 5, 6.
[x] Matt. vi. 24. [y] Phil. iii. 18, 19. [z] 2 Pet. ii. 21.

the knowledge of Christ, been delivered from the world—

[It is well you have thus far answered one end for which our blessed Saviour died: for "he gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world[zz]." But you will do well to bear in mind the caution in our text. A change of situation often brings with it a change of conduct. Perhaps you may be somewhat advanced in rank or station, or may form some new connexion, or be brought into some new circumstances: and you may easily persuade yourself that this change not only sanctions, but requires, a change in your habits and deportment. But "beware lest, as Satan beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so you also should be turned from the simplicity that is in Christ." Whatever your situation or circumstances may be, God's command to you is, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. *If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him*[a]." Even "the friendship of the world, if unduly sought or delighted in, is enmity with God[b]." Beware then how *in heart and affection* you return to the world. "Remember Lot's wife." "After once putting your hand to the plough, you must never look back again[c]." Methinks, if you would duly consider the image by which such apostacy is represented in the words following my text, you never *could* return to the world. One scarcely knows how even to quote the Scripture itself; so exceedingly does one nauseate the ideas suggested in it, and so utterly do one's feelings revolt from it. But it does paint the world, and all who love it, in very humiliating colours. O that all the votaries of gaiety, and fashion, and pleasure could but hear what the Apostle compares them to; even to "swine wallowing in the mire!" and that all who are tempted to conform to them, could be brought to reflect on "a dog returning to his own vomit again!" Yes, Brethren, *this is the feast to which your earthly friends invite you.* Ah! learn to view the world as God views it: learn to regard it as a country infected with the plague: and let your great concern be to get through it in safety. Go not unnecessarily where the infection rages most: but "come out from among them, and be separate; and touch not the unclean thing[d]." And, as it was the knowledge of Christ which first brought you forth from the world and its pollutions, seek to "grow in the knowledge of your adorable Lord and Saviour[e]," that, through the abundance of his grace communicated to you, you may live more than ever unto God; and that, "shining already as lights in the world[f]," your path may shine brighter and brighter unto the perfect day[g]."]

[zz] Gal. i. 4.
[a] 1 John ii. 15.
[b] Jam. iv. 4.
[c] Luke ix. 62.
[d] 2 Cor. vi. 17.
[e] 2 Pet. iii. 18.
[f] Phil. ii. 15.
[g] Prov. iv. 18.

MCLXXV.

THE DAY OF JUDGMENT.

2 Pet. iii. 10—14. *The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat; the earth also, and the works that are therein, shall be burnt up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for, and hasting unto, the coming of the day of God; wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot and blameless.**

* * * * *

BUT have we never contemplated our own situation? Have we never considered that the solemnities of the judgment-day are now in actual preparation; and that, not our own individual dwelling, or friends only, will be affected by them, but the whole universe? Our minds are at this time justly, and almost exclusively, engrossed with the consideration of this tremendous plot, which God, in mercy to this whole nation, has defeated. And I hope rather to strengthen, than efface, those impressions, by leading you to contemplate,

I. The events predicted in our text—

These are widely different indeed from each other; but they are inseparably connected, and infallibly simultaneous. Let us consider,

1. The dissolution of this present world—

[Once the world and every thing in it, with the exception of that small portion contained in the ark, was destroyed by water: and there is a time coming when the whole of it without exception will be destroyed by fire. Of the latter there will be no more expectation at the time, than there was of the former. In the days of Noah they were eating and drinking, and

* This was preached on occasion of *the horrible conspiracy against his Majesty's Ministers*; the meditated destruction of whom, by the explosion of a grenade of 14lbs. weight, afforded very abundant and *appropriate* matter as introductory to this discourse.

and marrying and giving in marriage, as securely as at any former period of the world: and would not believe that they were in any danger, till, on the entrance of Noah into the ark, the flood came and destroyed them all. So, at the last day, the inhabitants of this globe will be as little occupied with the thoughts of judgment, as we are at this moment. Our Lord tells us, that "he will come as a thief in the night;" that, without any previous warning, the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, and the earth, with every thing in it, shall be burnt up."

Conceive now the feelings of men at the very first moment that this tremendous and irresistible combustion shall burst forth. Some faint idea may be entertained, if only you suppose that the plot, which God in his mercy has defeated, had been accomplished. Conceive the company that was assembled, either as partaking of the friendly repast, or as deliberating on the affairs of state, and consulting with each other for the welfare of the nation: Conceive of them as beholding the desolating instrument cast in among them, and ready in a few moments to execute its destined office: With what terror would they be filled! and, if a moment were allowed for an ejaculatory petition, with what ardour would they implore mercy for their souls! Thus will it be in every quarter of the globe. All, except the remnant, who, in the habit of their minds, have been dying daily, will be ready to "call upon the rocks and mountains to fall upon them, and to cover them from the wrath of the lamb," whose judgment they dread.

But to that happy remnant another scene will open: for to them shall be revealed,]

2. The establishment of a new and better state—

[They, "according to God's promise, are even now looking for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness:" and then shall that new state open to their view. In the bold and figurative language of prophecy, the Millennial state is sometimes described under these terms[a]———and well it may be; since, when compared with the present state of things, wherein iniquity so awfully abounds, it will be indeed "a new creation." But the period here spoken of is contemporaneous with the final judgment; and, consequently, must refer to heaven itself, where neither sin nor sorrow can ever dwell. That is the period of which St. John speaks, when he says, "I saw a new heaven, and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away ..... and there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth[b]."

Contemplate the feelings of the godly at the moment that this glory bursts upon them. In vain shall we look for any thing

[a] Isai. lxv. 17. & lxvi. 22. [b] Rev. xxi. 1, 27.

thing wherewith to compare it upon earth. Alas! the visions of the godly are not so bright; nor do their sublimest raptures make so deep an impression as do the terrors which are inspired by sudden and appalling danger. But, as contrasted with the feelings of the ungodly, we may conceive in some little measure their bliss. Let us picture to ourselves the rich man, and Lazarus, entering at the same moment into the eternal world, the one beholding the abyss of hell ready to swallow him up, and the other fixing his eyes upon his God and Saviour, whose glory and felicity he is about to share. But]

We shall contemplate these things to more advantage, if we view them in connexion with,

II. The effect which the prospect of those events should produce upon us—

This the Apostle sets forth,

1. In a way of candid appeal—

[We all look for these events, nor do any of us doubt but that they will come in due season. Let me then ask of all who are here present, "What manner of persons ought ye to be?" Should you not be waiting for that period "in all holy conversation and godliness?" Should you not be "looking for it, and hasting unto it" with a holy eagerness, to meet "your God at his coming?" As for the things of this life, they should be as nothing in our eyes. Being so soon to part with them all, we should sit loose to them; as the Apostle says; "They who have wives should be as though they had none; and they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; and they that use this world, as not abusing it: *for the fashion of this world passeth away*[c]." I well know, that, when such a state of mind is recommended by us, we appear to require more than is necessary. But I will venture to appeal to every considerate man, whether this be not the conversation that becomes us, when our God is coming to judgment; and when he has told us that "he will come as a thief in the night?" Would it not be madness to be dreaming of "peace and safety, till sudden and everlasting destruction come upon us[d]?" The wise virgins were not wise in this respect, that, like the foolish virgins, they slumbered and slept. Happily for them, they had oil in their vessels with their lamps; or else, with the foolish virgins, they also would have been excluded from the nuptial feast. The true frame for all of us to be in, is that of ardent

[c] 1 Cor. vii. 29—31. [d] 1 Thess. v. 2, 3.

ardent and affectionate expectation; "our loins being girt, and our lamps trimmed," and our whole souls as "those who wait for the coming of their Lord." Maintaining this frame, you may rest assured, that "the Lord Jesus Christ will confirm you to the end[e]," and present you faultless before the presence of his Father's glory with exceeding joy[f]."]

2. In a way of affectionate intreaty—

["Beloved" Brethren, "Seeing that ye look for such things, I beseech you be diligent that ye may be found of God in peace, without spot and blameless." Think, if that day should come upon you unprepared; and, instead of going forth to meet a loving Saviour, you should behold only an angry and avenging Judge: how terrible will this be! Lose not an hour then; but be diligent in seeking peace with God through the Son of his love. It is the blood of Christ, and that only, which can effect your reconciliation with God: and therefore lose not a moment in sprinkling it upon your souls; yea, let your holiest actions, as well as your more acknowledged sins, be purged with it from their defilement. Endeavour, too, to preserve a "spotless and blameless" conduct throughout your whole lives, being "sincere and without offence until the day of Christ." Let no allowed sin be found in you: but so "cleanse yourselves from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit, that you may perfect holiness in the fear of God," and be acknowledged by him as "Israelites indeed, in whom there was no guile." This will doubtless require "diligence:" but surely the occasion justly deserves all the care and labour you can bestow upon it. Can you doubt whether those, whose lives have been lately in such imminent peril, have taken precautions against any future surprise? Would they not be justly blamed, if they were to be as heedless of danger, as they were before they knew of the conspiracy that was formed against them? Be *ye* then on your guard. *They*, whatever attempts were made against them, might escape: but no possibility of escape remains for *you*. "Your God will come, even as a thief in the night;" and therefore I intreat you all to be diligent, that, "whether he come in the evening, or at midnight, or at cock-crowing, or in the morning[g]," "you may be found of him in peace, without spot and blameless"———

I only add, "Account the long-suffering of God to be salvation[h]." You have long been spared; and God is still forbearing

[e] 1 Cor. i. 7, 8. [f] Jude 24.

[g] Mark xiii. 32—37. The particular instructions in this passage, "Take ye heed, watch, and pray," may here be dwelt upon to advantage.

[h] ver. 15.

forbearing to call you to your great account. "Beloved Brethren," "Despise not this goodnsss, and forbearance, and long-suffering of your God; but let them lead you to repentance[i]." Though the general judgment should be long deferred, your own particular doom will be fixed, the very instant that you shall be summoned into the eternal world. Do not then delay till it be too late, but "to-day, while it is called to-day, harden not your hearts," lest God cut you off in your sins, and "swear in his wrath that you shall never enter into his rest."]

[i] Rom. ii. 4.

MCLXXVI.

THE BENEFITS ARISING FROM FAITH IN CHRIST.

1 John. i. 1—3. *That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled of the word of life; (for the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;) that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son, Jesus Christ.*

IT is impossible to read these words, and not be struck with the extreme earnestness of the Apostle in his mode of giving the testimony before us. It seems evident, that the truths which he affirms had been much controverted; and that the evidence on which they rested had been called in question. And the fact was, that many heresies had arisen even whilst he was yet alive. Some even went so far as to deny that Jesus had ever died and risen again: they asserted, that all those transactions, which were recorded of him by the Evangelists, had taken place in appearance only, and not in reality. Against such absurd and impious conceits, St. John, now at a very advanced age, bore his testimony with a zeal suited to the occasion. He was the only surviving witness of the events referred to; and hence he repeats, even to tautology, the evidence which he had had again and again, from all his senses, respecting the

the truth of all that he affirmed: and he urges upon the whole Christian Church the reception of his testimony, by representing the incalculable benefits which all who believed it would receive.

That we may enter fully into the declarations before us, let us consider,

I. His testimony—

This may be understood as relating to the Gospel generally—

[The Gospel is certainly called "the word of life[a]:" and it was from eternity hid "with the Father[b]," and at last, "at the beginning" of the Gospel dispensation[c], was manifested to the Apostles[d], who had every possible means of examining and ascertaining the truth of it[e]; and who, in consequence of the fullest conviction in their own minds, "bare witness" to it as the means by which alone eternal life could be obtained[f]. This sense, I say, the words before us may very properly bear: and, inasmuch as the Gospel is elsewhere denominated "the word of life," (which Christ is not;) and the words "from the beginning[ff]," generally, though not always in the Epistles of St. John, import, "from the beginning of the Gospel dispensation," it is by no means improbable that this may be the true sense of the passage.

On the other hand, his mode of expression is far less proper, if applied to the Gospel, than if applied personally to the Lord Jesus Christ; to whom the generality of Commentators suppose the Apostle to refer. We therefore observe, that]

It may be understood also as relating personally to the Lord Jesus Christ—

[He, though not called "the word of life," is constantly known as "The Word[g]:" He also is called "The Life[h]:" and what seems more particularly to determine the point is, that he is in this very Epistle called, "Eternal Life:" "This is the true God, and Eternal Life[i]." He too was from eternity "with the Father[k]," and in due time "was manifest in the flesh[l]." And it was *his* existence that was so determinately denied by the

[a] Phil. ii. 16. [b] Eph. iii. 9.

[c] ἀπ' ἀρχῆς must of necessity be so understood in other parts of this Epistle; Ch. ii. 7, 24. & iii. 11.

[d] Rom. xvi. 25, 26.

[e] "Seeing and hearing" of the truth are applied to Christ, as well as to the Apostles. John iii. 11. with John viii. 26, 38.

[f] Mark xvi. 16. [ff] In Ch. ii. 13, 14. [g] Rev. xix. 13.

[h] John xi. 25. [i] 1 John v. 20. [k] John i. 18.

[l] 1 Tim. iii. 16.

the heretics whom the Apostle wished to silence. He, too, not only had lived in closest intimacy with his Disciples before his crucifixion, but, after his death and resurrection, had appeared to them for forty days; and, when they doubted whether it were *he*, or whether it were not a spirit whom they saw, he said to them, "*Handle* me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have[m]." Now, if we consider the Apostle as speaking personally of him, we can account for the vast variety of expressions tending to confirm the testimony which he bore respecting him: Whereas, if we apply the expressions to the Gospel, the terms are multiplied far beyond what the occasion called for, and the metaphors are stronger than he could with propriety use. Besides, if we understand him as speaking of Christ personally, there is a remarkable coincidence between the beginning of this Epistle of St. John, and the beginning of his Gospel. "In the beginning was the word:" and the word was "with God," and the word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. "In him was life;" and "the life was the light of men." And "the word was made flesh, and dwelt amongst us; and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father[n]."

But, whether we understand the expressions as relating to the Gospel of Christ, or to his person,]

It must of necessity be understood as declaring, that in Christ Jesus there is life, even eternal life—

[The Apostle testified of Christ, as he says in a subsequent chapter of this Epistle: "We have seen and do testify, that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world[o]." If we inquire more particularly what the substance of his testimony was, he informs us: "This is the witness of God which he hath testified of his Son." "And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life; and this life is in his Son: he that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life[p]."

Thus we see, in fact, that, whether we understand the passage as speaking of the Gospel, or of Christ himself, it comes to the same point. If the Gospel be spoken of, it is as revealing Christ: if Christ be spoken of, it is as revealed in the Gospel; or, in other words, as being "the way, the truth, and the life[q]."

Bear in mind then, that all that is spoken of Christ in the holy Gospels is true: the Apostles were ear-witnesses, and eye-witnesses, of it, even of all that they relate. "They did not follow cunningly-devised fables, when they made known the power and coming of the Lord Jesus, but were eye-witnesses

[m] Luke xxiv. 39. [n] John i. 1—4, 14. [o] 1 John iv. 14.
[p] 1 John v. 9, 11, 12. [q] John xiv. 6.

nesses of his Majesty: for they were with him in the Holy Mount, when he received from God the Father honour and glory, and when there came to him a voice from the Excellent Glory, saying, This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased[r]." Whether therefore they speak of his sufferings or his glory, their testimony may be relied on: and we may be sure that in Him is salvation, and in Him alone.]

The extreme urgency of the Apostle in commending to us his testimony, leads to contemplate,

II. The benefit of receiving it—

The Apostles themselves were brought into a most exalted state through faith in this Divine Saviour—

[" Hear what the Apostle speaks respecting it:" " Truly," says he, " our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." By the Lord Jesus Christ they were brought into a state of reconciliation with God; and were enabled to regard him in the endearing character of a Father. " Through Him too, and by the Holy Spirit, they had access to God[s]" at all times, pouring out their hearts before him, making known to him their every want, and committing to him their every care. Through the same divine channel, God descended into their bosoms, making known to them his will, communicating to them his grace, and shedding abroad in their hearts a sense of his love. Nay more, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost had come down and taken up their residence within them, dwelling in them as in a temple, and manifesting to them, as far as they were capable of beholding it, all the glory of the Godhead[t]. From hence arose within them infallible peace and joy, which were to them an earnest and foretaste of their heavenly inheritance; for they " knew that Christ was in the Father, and in them also; and that they too were in him[u]." Such had been their happy state from the first moment that they had believed in Christ; more sparingly indeed in the first instance, but progressively advancing as their knowledge of Christ became more intimate, and their affiance in him more entire.]

And we also, by the same faith, are brought to a participation of all the same privileges—

[" These things," says the Apostle, " we declare unto you, that ye may have fellowship with us." And in what does that fellowship consist, but in a participation of all the same privileges and blessings which they enjoyed? And this is indeed the portion of all who receive their testimony aright.

All

[r] 2 Pet. i. 16—18.
[s] Eph. ii. 18.
[t] John xiv. 16, 17, 18, 21, 23.
[u] John xiv. 20.

All Believers are brought into one family, of which Christ is the Head[x]. The moment we believe, "we come to Mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and Church of the first-born which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the Mediator of the New Covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, which speaketh better things than that of Abel[y]." Now here we see the whole family: here is God the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ the Mediator; here also are the angels who never sinned, and all the hosts of the redeemed in heaven, and all the saints that are still on earth: all are brought together into one family, and all have fellowship with each other as the head and the members of the same body: so that every individual Believer now has the same fellowship with the Apostles, as they had with each other and with the prophets who had gone before them; and the same "fellowship too with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ." Does this appear too strong? It is not so strong as what our blessed Saviour himself has spoken upon the subject. For he not only declares to us, that "both He and his Father will come to us, and make their abode with us[z];" but he declared to his Father also, "I have given them the glory which thou gavest me, that they may be one, even as we are one; I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one[a]." Here, I say, the union of the different members of his body is compared with the union which subsists between the different persons of the Godhead, than which nothing can be conceived so entire, so mysterious, so unchangeable.

Know ye, then, that this is the state into which you will be brought, if only you receive the testimony of God respecting his dear Son. Believe truly, that "in him is life," and that through faith in him your souls shall live; and then all the fulness of these blessings shall be yours: nor shall even the beloved Apostle himself possess a blessing, of which you shall not, according to your capacity, partake with him.

And here let me say, that, if all the tautology which the Apostle makes use of in my text had been multiplied an hundredfold, it would not have been too much for the occasion; since nothing can exceed the misery of those who reject this testimony, or the happiness of those who truly receive it.]

CONTEMPLATE now, I pray you, the object which the Apostle had in view in all these earnest solicitations—

[" These

[x] Eph. i. 10. & iii. 15.
[y] Heb. xii. 22—24.
[z] John xiv. 23.
[a] John xvii. 21—23.

[" These things," says he, " I write unto you, that your joy may be full[b]." It was for this end that our blessed Lord himself had so strongly and so continually inculcated them: " These things speak I in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves[c]." And this is the object which I also would endeavour to attain. Beloved Brethren, consider how unspeakable must be the joy of being brought into fellowship with the Apostles in all that they ever did, or ever shall, possess! All that access to God, all that intercourse with God, all that sense of Christ's incomprehensible love, all that enjoyment of his presence, and all that fruition of his glory! it is all yours by promise and by oath, if only you truly believe in Christ! Oh, put it not from you: defer not to seek it, yea, to seek it with your whole hearts! Then shall you know what it is to have a heaven upon earth: for, though now ye see not the Lord Jesus with your bodily eyes, yet shall you, by believing, be brought into such communion with him, that " your joy in him shall be unspeakable and glorified[d]."]

[b] ver. 4. [c] John xvii. 13. [d] 1 Pet. i. 8.

MCLXXVII.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING CONFORMED TO GOD'S IMAGE.

1 John i. 5—7. *This is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: but if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.*

IN fulfilling the Ministerial office, it is not sufficient that we set before our people the evidences of Christianity, or inculcate the performance of some moral duties: we are Messengers from God to men; and we must " declare to them the message which we have received from him." We must not alter or conceal any part of that which we have been commanded to deliver; but must make known the whole counsel of God; and, having declared it with all plainness and fidelity, must urge the acceptance of it with all the energy we possess.

We

We have a message then from God to you: we are commanded to open to you the Divine character, and to call you by the most impressive arguments to become conformed to his image. In discharging this duty we proceed to set before you,

I. The character of God—

The term, "light," in Scripture, has various acceptations; but there are two things which we shall notice as more particularly comprehended in it in the words before us. It is the property of light to discover all things; and it is perfectly pure and incapable of pollution: when therefore it is said, that "God is light," we must understand it as designating,

1. His infinite knowledge—

[God is "a God of knowledge[a]." "There is no creature which is not manifest in his sight." The transactions of darkness are not hid from him: He sees the adulterer, that avails himself of the darkness of the night to visit his guilty paramour. His eye is upon the thief, that lays his hand upon his neighbour's property. He notices the fraudalent dealer, who sells by false weights and measures, or takes advantage of the purchaser's ignorance to get rid of a bad commodity, and to exact of him a higher price than it is worth. Nor is it the actions only that God inspects; his eyes are not only on our ways, but on our very hearts. We are apt to think that "the thick clouds are a covering to him, so that he cannot see[b]:" but "the darkness and light to him are both alike[c]:" "He searcheth the heart, and trieth the reins[d]:" "He knows the things that come into our minds, every one of them[e]:" "He weigheth our spirits[f]," and discerns the precise quantity of good or evil that there is in all our thoughts and desires: yea, "He knows the imaginations that we go about, even now, years before" the thoughts are distinctly formed in our hearts[g]. Our inmost souls are as much open to his view, as the sacrifices were to the Priest, when he had flayed them for the purpose of examining the flesh, and cut them open to inspect their inward parts[h]. In short, "*with him is no darkness at all:*" "hell and destruction are before him; much more the hearts of the children of men[i]."]

2. His

[a] 1 Sam. ii. 3. [b] Job xxii. 13, 14. [c] Ps. cxxxix. 11, 12.
[d] Jer. xvii. 10. [e] Ezek. xi. 5. [f] Prov. xvi. 2.
[g] Deut. xxxi. 21. [h] This is the idea suggested, Heb. iv. 13.
[i] Prov. xv. 11.

2. His unspotted holiness—

["Light" is perhaps the only thing which is incapable of being polluted; and therefore is peculiarly fit to represent the immaculate purity of God.

God is a holy Being; yea, "glorious in holiness," as well as in every other perfection. "He hateth all the workers of iniquity:" "He is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity[k]," without the utmost abhorrence of it. In this respect also, as well as in the former, "*there is no darkness at all in him:*" there is none *in his nature;* there is none *in his dispensations.*

Consider *his nature:* which of his attributes has the smallest mixture of unholiness? His sovereignty is not a weak partiality, but a holy exertion of his will, according to his own determinate and eternal counsels. His justice is not a rigorous severity, but a holy regard to the honour of his broken law. His mercy is not a weak exercise of pity at the expense of justice and truth, but a holy display of his unbounded compassion, in a way that at the same time illustrates and magnifies all his other perfections.

Consider *his dispensations:* these, it is true, are oftentimes inscrutable to us; yet is he "righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works[l]." We are sometimes indeed ready, through unbelief, to question his wisdom and his goodness[m]. When we see the wicked triumphing, and the righteous suffering under the accumulated trials of persecution from man and desertion from God, we are apt to be offended, and to ask, Whether there be a God that ruleth in the earth? But in both these respects is his holiness expressly vindicated in the Sacred Writings: the Martyrs that are now in glory, at the same time that they expostulate, as it were, with God on the subject of his forbearance towards their persecutors, address him as "holy and true[n]:" and David, when complaining bitterly of the dereliction that he suffered, takes especial care to acknowledge that, in the midst of all, his holiness is unimpeached; "O God I cry in the day-time, but thou hearest not; and in the night-season I am not silent; *but thou art holy*[o]." When therefore we are not able to comprehend the reason of God's dispensations, we must still confess, that though "clouds and darkness are round about him, righteousness and judgment are the basis of his throne[p]."]

The next part of the message points out to us,

II. The necessity and benefit of a conformity to him—

The

[k] Hab. i. 13. [l] Ps. cxlv. 17. [m] Ps. lxxiii. 12—14.
[n] Rev. vi. 10. [o] Ps. xxii. 1—3. [p] Ps. xcvii. 2.

The saints are said to be renewed after the Divine image: and it is worthy of particular observation, that the only two points in which this renovation is said to consist, are knowledge[q], and holiness[r]. We see then from hence wherein that conformity, which we are to attain, consists: it consists in knowledge and in holiness, or, as my text expresses it, in "walking in the light as he is in the light:" *our minds must be enlightened with the knowledge of God's truth;* and *our hearts must be purified in the performance of his will.*

Let us notice then,

1. The *necessity* of this conformity—

[Many will pretend to have communion with God, while they are ignorant of the salvation revealed in the Gospel, and living in the habitual indulgence of sin. But, while they thus "walk in darkness," what "fellowship can they have with God?" What access can they have to him, when they do not so much as know the way of "access to him through the rent vail of the Redeemer's flesh[s]?" and what regard can they feel in their hearts towards him, while they are under the allowed dominion of worldly and carnal lusts? Their profession is a system of falsehood and hypocrisy: "they lie, and do not the truth:" they may work up themselves to ecstacies if they will; but they neither have, nor can have, any fellowship with God; for how "shall the throne of iniquity (or one in whom sin reigns) have fellowship with him[t]?" "What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath *light* with *darkness*[u]?"]

2. The benefit of this conformity—

[If a person be walking unfeignedly and progressively in the study of God's will, and in obedience to it, he possesses two great and unspeakable benefits; namely, *communion with God*, and *acceptance before him*.

He has *communion with God*[x]. God loves the humble, diligent, obedient servant: "He will come to him," and "lift up the light of his countenance upon him," and "manifest himself to him as he does not unto the world." He will "shed

[q] Col. iii. 10. [r] Eph. iv. 24. [s] Heb. x. 19, 20.
[t] Ps. xciv. 20. [u] 2 Cor. vi. 14.
[x] The opposition between the 6th and 7th verses shews that ver. 7 does not relate to the communion of the saints with each other, but to their fellowship with God.

"shed abroad his love in his heart," and "give him a spirit of adoption, whereby he shall cry, Abba, Father." The person himself may not be very conversant with raptures: but, whether he be more or less sensible of God's favour to him, it is manifest that he has fellowship with God: his knowledge of the Gospel proves that God has taught him; and his experience of its sanctifying power proves that God has strengthened and supported him.

He has also *acceptance before God:* he is not like an unpardoned sinner: Jesus Christ has washed away his sins in the fountain of his blood; yea, every day, every hour, every moment, is he cleansing him from the pollution that adheres to his best services. This cleansing is a continued act of Christ[y]: and through it the soul maintains its peace with God, and is regarded by God "without spot or blemish[z]." Cleansed by Jesus from "the iniquity of his holy things," he is presented "faultless before the presence of God's glory with exceeding joy[a]."

Such are the benefits of cleaving to Christ, and "walking as he walked:" and a life devoted to God is not so properly the means of obtaining these benefits, as it is *the evidence that we already possess them.*]

From this most instructive subject we may LEARN,

1. The connexion between *faith and works*—

[One man hopes to be saved by his works, while he disregards faith in Christ: another hopes that his faith will save him, though it never produce good works. But both of these deceive their own souls: for no man can do such works as the Gospel requires, unless he embrace the truths which it reveals: and, if he could do them, they would be utterly insufficient to justify him before God. On the other hand, "the faith that is without works, is dead:" and as it differs not from the faith of devils, so will it bring us no better portion than theirs. Knowledge is necessary to produce holiness; and holiness is necessary to evince that our knowledge is truly spiritual and saving. It is not by separating them from each other, but by uniting them together, that we are to "walk in the light as God is in the light."]

2. The connexion between *duty and happiness*—

[The greater part of the world expect happiness in the ways of sin: but God has warned us that there is "no peace to the wicked." There is no real happiness but in fellowship with God: and there is no fellowship with him, without a conformity to him. If then we would be happy in this world, we

[y] "Cleanseth." [z] Eph. v. 26, 27. [a] Jude 24.

we should be religious: we should study to know and do the will of God. Then we should be happy in sickness as well as health, and in the prospect of death no less than in the midst of earthly enjoyments.]

3. The connexion between *grace and glory*—

[The saints in glory are called "saints in light;" and in order to partake of their inheritance, we must be "made meet for it[b]." An unregenerate sinner would not be happy, even if he were in heaven. There is a total difference of character between them that are saved and them that perish: those who are saved, love God, and delight in him, and make it the labour of their souls to glorify him: whereas they who perish, would, if they were able, pluck him from his throne: it would be glad tidings to them if they were informed that he exists no longer. Such precisely is the difference between saints and sinners in this world; the one find all their happiness in serving God; the other say in their hearts, "We wish there were no God." Neither the one nor the other indeed attain the same *degree* of holiness or wickedness in this world that they will in the next: but in all other respects their characters will continue the same that they are in this life. If ever then we would have fellowship with God in heaven, we must begin it here: and, if ever we would dwell with him in the regions of everlasting light, we must now be "brought out of darkness into the marvellous light of his Gospel[c]," and "walk henceforth as children of the light and of the day[d]."

[b] Col. i. 12. [c] 1 Pet. ii. 9. [d] Eph. v. 8.

MCLXXVII.

CONFESSION NECESSARY TO FORGIVENESS.

1 John i. 8, 9. *If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us: if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

THESE words are rendered familiar to our ears by being read almost continually as introductory to the Service of our Church. On this account they may appear perhaps the less interesting; though in reality they are, from that very circumstance, commended to us as deserving a more than ordinary attention. The truths indeed which are contained in them are extremely plain and simple: but they are of infinite

infinite importance to every Child of man, inasmuch as they declare *the pitiable condition of a self-vindicating Moralist*, and *the happy condition of a self-condemning Penitent*. We shall consider the substance of them under these two heads—Let us consider,

I. The pitiable condition of a self-vindicating moralist—

Persons of a high moral character are too often classed with the Pharisees of old, whose leading feature was hypocrisy. But,

Moral characters are proper objects of our love—

[No one can doubt but that morality is highly estimable, even though it do not flow from those divine principles which give it its chief value in the sight of God. So at least St. Paul thought, when before the whole Jewish council he said, "Men and Brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day[a]." In this assertion he spoke of his life previous to his conversion. In another place, speaking of the same period, he informs us, that he was, "as touching the righteousness of the law, blameless;" and, that he had justly considered this as "gain to him[b]." And such may morality well be considered, wherever it exists: it is a gain to the person himself, in that he is kept from many actual offences: it is a gain to all his neighbours, who cannot but feel a beneficial influence from such a life: and it is a benefit to the whole world, as far as the light of such an example can extend. True it is, that, when St. Paul fully understood the Gospel, he counted all his morality "but loss for Christ." Yet this does not at all derogate from the intrinsic excellence of morality: and to speak of morality in the contemptuous and degrading terms which many religious persons, and not a few incautious Ministers too, use in reference to it, is extremely erroneous and blame-worthy, inasmuch as it tends to lessen men's regard for moral virtue, and to render the Gospel itself odious as hostile to good works. I would that every Disciple of Christ would consider the example of his Divine Master in reference to this very point; and not consider it only, but follow it. When the rich youth came to him, and was directed by him to keep the different commandments of the Decalogue, he answered, "Master, all these have I observed from my youth." Now I would ask, What is the treatment which that young man would have experienced from the great mass of religious Professors? I greatly

[a] Acts xxiii. 1. [b] Phil. iii. 6, 7.

greatly fear that the general feeling towards him would have been that of contempt, rather than of love. But how did our blessed Lord and Saviour regard him? We are told, "Then Jesus, beholding him, *loved* him[c]." And this is the spirit we should manifest towards all who are observant of the Divine laws, though they may not possess that faith in Christ which would stamp a new character upon the whole of their conduct. In proportion as any man excels in the different branches of moral virtue, he ought to be held as an object of respect, esteem, and love.]

But when they trust in their morality, they deserve our pity—

[I do not suppose that any persons would affirm, that they never had sinned at all. I rather conceive, that the Apostle speaks of persons affirming that they never had sinned *to such a degree as to deserve God's wrathful displeasure.* This, alas! is too often the effect of morality; that it causes men to overlook their manifold defects, and to be filled with self-complacency, when, if they had juster views of themselves, they would be bowed down rather with a sense of their own unworthiness.

Now such persons, how excellent soever they may be in other respects, are in a truly pitiable condition: for "they deceive themselves."

"They deceive themselves" in relation *to the extent of their attainments.* They do, in fact, say with the rich youth, "What lack I yet?" whilst "they lack *one* thing," even *that* very thing which is indispensable to their acceptance with God. Our Lord brought the young man to the test; and, by a command which he gave, tried him, whether God or the world were the higher in his esteem? It was a grief to the young man to renounce all hope of an interest in the Saviour; but he knew not how to part with his possessions; and therefore abandoned the Lord Jesus rather than them. So, if moralists were brought to the test, they would shew, and indeed they do continually shew, that the love of Christ is not dominant in their hearts, and that they have never seen him as that "pearl of great price, for which they are ready to part with all."

They deceive themselves also in relation to *their state before God.* They imagine that they do not deserve, and consequently are not in danger of, his wrath and indignation. Thus it was with the apostle Paul before his conversion. Hear his own acknowledgement respecting it: "I was alive without the law once; but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died[d]:" that is, before I understood the spirituality of the law,

[c] Mark x. 19—21. [d] Rom. vii. 9.

law, I thought my obedience to it so perfect that I was in no danger of condemnation for my offences against it: but when my eyes were opened to see the extent of its demands and the defects of my obedience, I saw at once that I was deservedly under a sentence of death and condemnation.

Thus it is with multitudes who are exemplary in their moral conduct: in the midst of all their confidence they deceive themselves; and whilst they take credit to themselves for being right in the sight of God, they shew that they have never yet received "the truth as it is in Jesus," and that, consequently, "the truth is not in them."]

Let us now turn our attention to,

II. The happy condition of the self-condemning penitent.

The "confession" which characterizes a true penitent, of course is not to be understood of a *mere* acknowledgement, but an acknowledgement accompanied with suitable contrition, and with a humble faith in the Lord Jesus. It imports such a confession as was made by the High Priest on the great day of annual expiation, when he laid his hands on the scape-goat, and confessed *over him* all the sins of all the children of Israel, whilst all of those whose sins he so transferred were "*afflicting their souls* before God[e]." I may add, that this confession implies also a forsaking of the sins so confessed; as it is said, "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper; but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy[f]."

Now respecting all such penitents, I do not hesitate to say, that,

1. Whatsoever they need shall certainly be vouchsafed unto them—

[Two things the penitent panteth after; namely, the forgiveness of his sins, and the renovation of his soul after the Divine image. And, behold, these are the very things promised to him in our text: "If we confess our sins, God will forgive our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." How reviving to the contrite soul is such a declaration as this! Here is no limitation as to the number or heinousness of the sins that may have been previously committed; nor any exception as to the measure of depravity which may have defiled the

[e] Lev. xvi. 21, 29, 30. [f] Prov. xxviii. 13.

the soul, or the degree of obduracy to which it may have attained. "Though our sins may have been as scarlet, or of a crimson dye, they shall all be washed away in the blood of Christ, and the soul become white as the driven snow[g]." "Clean water also shall be sprinkled on us, even the Holy Ghost in his sanctifying operations, to cleanse us from all our filthiness and from all our uncleanness. A new heart shall be given us, and a new spirit be put within us: and God, by the mighty working of his own power, will cause us "to walk in his judgments and to keep his statutes[h]." Here is all that the penitent can desire. The promises are perfectly commensurate with his necessities: and, "laying hold on these promises, he shall be able to cleanse himself from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit, and to perfect holiness in the fear of God[i]."]

For this, those very perfections of the Deity which are most adverse to them are pledged—

[If the penitent desire mercy, *Justice* frowns upon him, and demands judgment against him: and *Truth* requires, that all the threatenings which have been denounced against sin and sinners should be executed upon him. But, through the mediation of the Lord Jesus Christ, these perfections of the Deity are not only satisfied, but are converted into friends, yea and made the strongest advocates for the penitent's salvation. What a wonderful declaration is this, that, "if we confess our sins, God is *faithful* and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness!" That *mercy* should be displayed in forgiveness, we can easily imagine: but how can *justice?* and how can *truth?* when, as has been before observed, both these attributes demand the sinner's condemnation? The Gospel solves this difficulty: it declares to us, that the Lord Jesus Christ has undertaken for us, and become our Surety, and by his own obedience unto death has satisfied all the demands of law and justice, and obtained for us the promise of eternal life: so that, if only we believe in him, and come to God through him, we may plead, even upon the very ground of *justice* and of *truth*, that God will fulfil to us all that he has promised to the Lord Jesus in our behalf, and impart to us all the blessings which his only dear Son has purchased for us. Through this mysterious dispensation, the very *righteousness* of God is magnified in the exercise of mercy; and "God is *just*, whilst justifying the sinner that believes in Jesus[k]."

How blessed is the condition of the penitent when viewed in this light! Every thing is secured to him that his necessities

[g] Isai. i. 18.
[h] Ezek. xxxvi. 25—27.
[i] 2 Cor. vii. 1.
[k] Rom. iii. 26.

necessities require! and every thing confirmed to him by the very *justice* and *faithfulness* of Jehovah! Wipe away thy tears, thou weeping penitent; and "put off thy sackcloth, and gird thee with gladness:" for God has here "given thee the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness."]

Attend however to a few words of parting ADVICE—

1. Let your humiliation be deep and abiding—

[It can never be too deep: there is no measure of self-lothing or self-abhorrence that can exceed what the occasion calls for. Thou mayest heretofore have thought thyself so pure, that "thou hadst no sin" which could subject thee to the wrath of God. Now thou knowest that "the bed was too short for you to stretch yourself upon, and the covering too narrow for you to wrap yourself in[l]." "The pillows are plucked from your arms;" and "the untempered mortar with which you daubed your wall adheres no longer[m]." You have now learned to estimate your character by another standard. You see now your *defects*. You compare your obedience, not with the mere letter, but with the spirit, of the law: and from this view of your past life you know your just desert, and are convinced that the very best action, word, or thought of your whole life, if tried by the standard of God's holy law, would plunge you into merited and everlasting perdition. And so it is at this very moment, notwithstanding your change of character. You could no more bear the scrutiny of that perfect law, than you could in your days of unregeneracy. Let this thought never be forgotten: let it abide with you day and night. Job, before that God had appeared unto him, said, "If I justify myself, mine own mouth shall condemn me[n]:" and after he had beheld God in his majesty and glory, his humiliation, so far from being removed, was deepened: and he exclaimed, "Behold, I am vile: I repent therefore, and abhor myself in dust and ashes[o]." So let your increase both in grace and peace be marked by a proportionable increase in humiliation and contrition.]

2. Let your affiance in God be simple and uniform—

[Never for a moment entertain a thought of any worthiness in yourself, or suffer any thing to be blended with your faith in Christ. Rely on him as entirely as if your whole life had been a scene of the most enormous wickedness. Renounce entirely every thing of your own in point of dependence; and seek to "be found in Christ, not having your own righteousness, but the righteousness which is of God through faith

[l] Isai. xxviii. 20.
[m] Ezek. xiii. 10—20.
[n] Job ix. 20.
[o] Job xl. 4. & xlii. 6.

faith in him." And let this abide with you to your latest hour. Let neither a relapse into sin deter you from coming thus to Christ; nor the most spotless continuance in holiness render such a mode of coming to him unnecessary in your eyes. This is the way in which you *may* come, however aggravated may have been your guilt; and this is the way in which you *must* come, however eminent your attainments. It is not possible for you to be too much on your guard against either doubting the sufficiency of Christ to save you, or attempting to unite any thing with him as a joint ground of your hope. To err in either of these respects will be fatal: it will arm both justice and truth against you, and will make void all that the Lord Jesus has done and suffered for you. But rely simply and altogether upon him, and "you shall not be ashamed or confounded world without end."]

MCLXXVIII.

THE ADVOCACY AND ATONEMENT OF CHRIST.

1 John ii. 1, 2. *If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.*

THERE are two extremes to which men are apt to incline, namely, presumption and despair; and against both of these the Gospel is designed to guard us. The ungodly world at large imagine that God will never execute his threatened judgments: and some will take occasion even from the Gospel itself to expect impunity in the ways of sin. But the rich promises of the Gospel were never given for this end: it was never God's design that his "grace should be turned into licentiousness;" and therefore the Apostle affectionately warns us against such an abuse of it; "My little children, these things I write unto you, that ye sin not." On the other hand, there are some persons, who, from a sense of their manifold backslidings, are ready to despond. To these the Apostle proceeds to speak: he sets before them the offices which Christ sustains on the behalf of sinners; and encourages them under every fresh contracted guilt to look unto him as a willing, suitable, and all-sufficient Saviour.

To

To further this good work in your hearts, we will shew,

I. The offices of Christ—

It will be proper to notice first that which is last mentioned in the text—

He is a "Propitiation for sin"—

[To understand what is meant by this, we should consider the state of man. We were fallen creatures, and, in consequence of our fall, obnoxious to the wrath of God. To restore ourselves to the Divine favour was impossible, because we could not offer any atonement for the sins we had committed. God, though ready to forgive, could not exercise mercy towards us in any way which did not accord with his justice, holiness, and truth. Christ therefore undertook to make satisfaction to the Divine justice, so that "mercy and truth might meet together, and righteousness and peace might kiss each other." This he did by substituting himself in our place. "He bore our sins in his own body on the tree[a]," and "suffered, the just for the unjust[b]." Our apprehension of this matter will be greatly assisted, if we consider how it was represented under the Mosaic œconomy. Bullocks, goats, and lambs were offered in sacrifice to God. The offender, when he brought his sacrifice, laid his hands upon its head, and transferred to it his guilt; and then it was put to death in his stead. This sacrifice God accepted on behalf of the offerer, and, out of respect to it, forgave his iniquities[c]. This indeed was only a type: but it shadowed forth what was really done by Christ, who "came to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself[d]." The whole language of Scripture accords with this explanation, and confirms the truth of this stupendous mystery[e].]

He is also our "Advocate with the Father"—

[The office of an advocate is to appear for his client in a court of justice, and to plead his cause. Now this office also the Lord Jesus Christ executes in behalf of his people: He is gone up to the Court of Heaven, where "he appears in the presence of God for us[f]." The Holy Spirit also is our Advocate:

[a] 1 Pet. ii. 24.
[b] 1 Pet. iii. 18.
[c] Lev. i. 2, 4.
[d] Heb. ix. 26.
[e] Eph. v. 2. Rom. iii. 25. In this latter passage, as also in the text, the word which we translate "propitiation," is the same as is elsewhere translated, "mercy-seat." Compare Heb. ix. 5. But the illustration above given, is that which the scope of the passage evidently requires; and to explain the word in reference to the mercy-seat, would, *in this place*, only embarrass and obscure the sense.
[f] Job. xxxiii. 24.

Advocate: but there is a very wide difference between the advocacy of Christ, and of the Holy Spirit: the Spirit intercedes *in* us at the throne of *grace;* Christ intercedes *for* us at the throne of *glory:* the Spirit assists us to pray according to the will of God; Christ presents those prayers unto the Father, and renders them acceptable in his sight.

Now it was this advocacy of Christ which the Apostle had primarily in his view; and what he added respecting him as a Propitiation for sin, was a subordinate subject, introduced to shew *the ground of his intercession*, and *the reason of its efficacy.* It will be proper therefore to notice more particularly the connexion between these offices, and *the dependence of the one upon the other.*

If we could conceive that Jesus had undertaken to be our advocate, and yet had made no atonement for sin, his advocacy would have been altogether in vain: for, what plea could he have found? he could not have denied, or extenuated, our guilt: nor could he have promised that we should ever make compensation for what we had done amiss. His mouth therefore must have been shut as well as ours. But, having offered himself a sacrifice for our sins, he has an adequate and effectual plea for all who trust in him. Are they accused by their great adversary? yea, does God himself testify against them? "True, He will say, they are sinners, that deserve thy wrathful indignation: but behold the wounds in my hands, my feet, my side; these I endured for them; by these I expiated their guilt; yea, I gave my own life a ransom for them; and therefore deliver them from going down into the pit: I have satisfied the demands both of law and justice on their behalf, and on this account I look, not to thy mercy only, but to thy justice and thy faithfulness to forgive them[g]: Out of respect to me, thou mayest be just, and yet the justifier of all them that believe[h]."]

This view of his offices will naturally lead us to consider—

II. The comfort to be derived from them under every fresh-contracted guilt—

That we may speak more perspicuously on this subject, we shall notice,

1. The sensations which a view of those offices will produce—

[*Hope*, *joy*, and *peace* arise in succession to crown the exercise of faith. Till we are enabled to behold the crucified and exalted Saviour, we droop, and question the possibility of our acceptance with God; but when we are enabled to believe

[g] 1 John i. 9. [h] Rom. iii. 26.

believe in him, our fears are dissipated; our sorrows are turned into joy and exultation; and, after a season, the livelier motion of our affections, which was occasioned by the greatness and suddenness of the change, subsides into a solid and abiding peace. This is the order marked out both by prophets[i] and apostles[k], and experienced by all who live by faith on the Son of God.]

2. The suitableness of those offices to produce them—

[The intercessions of sinful men have often availed for the benefit of those for whom they were offered: but Christ is a "righteous" advocate, who, having no sins of his own to obstruct his access to God, may come with boldness into his presence, and with a certainty of acceptance. Besides, he is ever "with the Father," ready to offer his intercessions the very moment that he sees any danger of a breach between him and us. Moreover he is the "Christ," whom the Father *anointed* to this very office. It was the duty of the high-priest, not only to offer sacrifice, but to carry the blood of the sacrifice within the vail, and to burn incense before the mercy-seat: thus the office of intercession belongs to Jesus no less than that of offering an oblation: and consequently we have in his appointment to this office a pledge that he shall not intercede in vain.

The consolations arising from this office are heightened and confirmed by the consideration of his atonement: for in his one offering of himself there is a sufficiency of merit to justify all that shall believe in him. His death was a propitiation, not for the sins of a few only, "but for the sins of the whole world;" so that if all the sins that ever were committed from the foundation of the world, or ever shall be committed as long as the world shall stand, had been committed by any single individual, he would have no reason to despair; since if only he believed in Jesus, they should all be blotted out even as a morning cloud.

What marvellous truths are these! What a foundation for hope, and joy, and peace! O that our meditations on them might be sweet, and that our souls might ever experience their refreshing influence!]

ADDRESS,

1. The self-righteous—

[What ground is here afforded for looking to our own repentances or reformations, as though they could restore us to the Divine favour? We deny not the necessity or importance of these things; but we utterly deny their efficacy to save the soul. There is no Saviour but Christ: if *any* man sin,

[i] Isai. lv. 12. [k] Rom. xv. 13.

sin, however exemplary he may have been on the whole, he must trust in the atonement and intercession of Christ: there is no distinction between one sinner and another: all must equally depend on Christ: all must enter at that door[l]: all must build on that foundation[m]: all must be saved by the name of Christ, and by that only[n].]

2. The contrite—

[Let not the greatness of your guilt dismay you. Remember Abraham's intercession for the cities of the plain[o], and that of Moses for the Israelites, when God forbad him, as it were, to pray for them[p]. Yet neither Abraham nor Moses had redeemed their souls. But Jesus is our propitiation, as well as our advocate; and shall not HE prevail? See how he prevailed for Peter, who, if the Saviour had not interceded for him, would most probably have hanged himself in despair, as Judas did: but Christ said, "I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not:" and in answer to this prayer, he was restored both to his Apostleship and to the favour of his God. Thus effectual shall the Saviour's intercession be for you. Consider *in what manner* he intercedes for you: when he prayed for *himself* in his extremity, he said, "Father, *not as I will*, but as thou wilt:" but in his intercession for you he says, "Father *I will* that they whom thou hast given me, may be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory." Doubt not then, but that he "will pray the Father for you;" and that the Father, who has for so many thousands of years had respect to the bow in the clouds, and has forborne to deluge the earth again, will much more have respect to the Son of his love, and fulfil to your soul the promises of his grace.]

[l] John x. 9. [m] 1 Cor. iii. 11. [n] Acts iv. 12.
[o] Gen. xviii. 23—32. [p] Exod. xxxii. 9—14.

MCLXXIX.

CHRIST AN EXAMPLE TO HIS FOLLOWERS.

1 John ii. 6. *He that saith he abideth in him, ought himself also so to walk even as he walked.*

AMONG the various excellencies which distinguish Christianity from all other religions, one of very considerable importance is, that the Author of it condescended to exemplify in his own person every thing which it required of its most faithful adherents.

Different

Different Philosophers established rules for their followers: but no one ever professed himself a pattern, and much less a perfect pattern, of all that under any circumstances could be required of him. But the Lord Jesus Christ has perfectly fulfilled his own law, as for other ends, so also that he might "set us an example to follow his steps." True it is indeed that He is the sole Author of our salvation from first to last: but he does not on that account dispense with our obedience to his law: on the contrary, he says, that "all who abide in him, must walk as he walked."

There are some who deny that the law is to the Believer a rule of life. But supposing this error could not be refuted by *direct* testimony, which it easily and abundantly may, what would the advocates of it gain, if once they admitted, what I suppose no man would deny, that Christ is an example for us to follow? Did not he "fulfil all righteousness," even to the utmost extent of the moral law? And if he did, and is an example to us, must not we obey the law in the same manner, and to the same extent? We are not indeed to fulfil it *for the same ends*; because he alone, *as the Mediator* between God and man, can save men by his obedience unto death: but in all that he did *as a man*, we are to follow his steps: and if we neglect to do so, we shew, that we have no part or lot in his salvation.

The words I have read will lead me to set before you the principles, and the practice, of every true Christian.

I. His principles—

The Christian is united unto Christ by faith, as a branch to the vine; and his one great concern is to "abide in Christ."

For this he labours as the one ground of his hope—

[He knows that he has nothing, and can have nothing, in himself. He needs no one to tell him this: he has learned it, as from the Inspired Volume, so also from his own experience. He has found on numberless occasions how weak and sinful a creature

creature he is: and is well assured, that, if he had not "Jehovah himself for his righteousness and strength," it would be impossible for him ever to be saved. Hence he views with complacency the Lord Jesus Christ as the great Head of the Church. "It has pleased the Father, that in Christ should all fulness dwell[a]:" and in this respect he is altogether like-minded with the Father: for it pleases him in his inmost soul to have such an Head of vital influence, and such a Depository of all spiritual blessings. He is sensible that the branch derives all its life and fertility from its union with the vine: and that, if once separated from the stem, it would wither and die[b]. This idea he endeavours to realize; and "the life which he lives in the flesh, he lives altogether by faith in the Son of God[c]," "receiving out of his fulness[d]" a constant supply of grace and peace. If, as a blind and ignorant creature, he need wisdom; or as a guilty creature, he need righteousness; or as a polluted creature, he need sanctification; or as an enslaved creature, he need redemption: he looks for it all in Christ, whom he regards as furnished with all for the use of his Church, and as empowered to communicate it all to every one that trusts in him[e].]

In this he glories as his most exalted privilege—

[Humiliating as this life of dependence at first sight appears, he considers it as his highest honour, and as raising him even above Adam in Paradise. Adam, when in Paradise, was indeed perfect: but to him was committed the task of working out a righteousness for himself, and of maintaining by his own inherent powers his stedfastness in the Divine life. And hence he fell, and died, and involved both himself and all his posterity in ruin. But the Believer has a righteousness wrought out for him by his incarnate God; and "his life," instead of being committed to his own keeping, "is hid with Christ in God," where Satan cannot reach it; and therefore, since Christ has engaged that none shall ever pluck out of his hands those whom the Father hath committed to him, he shall endure unto the end; and, "when Christ, who is his life, shall appear, shall assuredly appear with him in glory[f]." Thus, in respect both of honour and security, is the Believer elevated even above Adam himself; since he has not a creature-righteousness wherein to stand before God, or a created power to uphold him; but a righteousness that is divine, and an arm that is omnipotent. To form a right judgment of his state, we must attend to what our blessed Lord himself has spoken on this subject. Indeed his words are so strong, that no man would dare to utter them if not warranted by his authority. What

[a] Col. i. 19. [b] John xv. 1—5. [c] Gal. ii. 21.
[d] John i. 16. [e] 1 Cor. i. 30. [f] Col. iii. 3, 4.

What would you say, if I were to affirm, that the life of faith resembles the very life which the Lord Jesus Christ lived when on earth; and that the Believer has the same dependence on the Lord Jesus Christ, as Christ himself, during his incarnate state, had on the Father; and the same security in him too; would you not be almost ready to shut your ears, and to accuse the Preacher of blasphemy? Yet is this what we are authorized by Christ himself to declare. Hear his own words: "He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him. *As* the living Father hath sent me, and *I live by the Father, even so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me*[s]." Say, Beloved, Is not here a ground of glorying? and, if the Believer did not glory in this privilege, would not the very stones cry out against him?]

Whilst with confidence we affirm these to be the Christian's principles, we with no less confidence proceed to declare,

II. His practice—

It is thought by many that a life of faith is unfriendly to morality; since if all our righteousness is in him, what need have we of any of our own? and, if he be engaged to keep us, what need have we of any care or watchfulness to keep ourselves? But this reasoning is altogether fallacious; since every one who by faith abides in Christ acknowledges it his bounden duty to "walk as he walked."

He acknowledges it, I say, as his bounden duty—

[He does not conceive of Christ as liberating him from the obligations of morality: for though he is free from the law *as a covenant*, he is not free from it, nor would wish to be freed from it, *as a rule of life*. He considers himself as "not without law, but under the law to Christ." Were he permitted to violate the commands of God, he would account it a curse rather than a privilege. Such a liberty would appear to him only like a permission to drink poison, which, however sweet to the taste, would prove "the gall of asps within him." So far from imagining himself freed from the restraints of the law, he considers all that Christ has done for him as laying him under ten-fold obligations to holiness both of heart and life. His motives to obedience are changed indeed: but his obligations to it are not a whit diminished, yea, rather, are greatly heightened; because he well knows, that the

[s] John vi. 56, 57.

the very end for which his Saviour died was, to redeem us from all iniquity, and to purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works."]

He makes it his constant and determined aim—

[The true Believer is, not a mere follower of Christ, but an imitator also[h]: and it is his delight to set the Saviour before him as his great Exemplar. When he sees how entirely the soul of Jesus was wrapped up in his work, and that it was "his meat and drink to do his Father's will," he pants, and sighs, and with shame and sorrow of heart exclaims, O that there were "in me the mind that was in Christ Jesus!" When he beholds the ardour of Christ's love to man, his unwearied labours, his patient sufferings, his exertions in every possible way, he girds up his loins, and follows the footsteps of his Lord; and though he knows that he can never attain to his perfection, yet he proposes to himself no object short of that, and strives to be "holy as he was holy," and "perfect as he was perfect:" nor does the glory of heaven itself appear more desirable in his eyes, than does a conformity to the Saviour's image in righteousness and true holiness. In a peculiar manner, he notices the tempers of his Divine Master; his meekness, his patience, his forbearance, his love to enemies, his compassion even to his very murderers: he sees what a fallen creature he himself is, and he cries mightily to God for grace and strength, that he may be enabled to mortify every feeling that is opposite to love, and to "purify himself even as his Lord and Master was pure[i]."]

Now as this subject gives us a deep insight into the whole of the Gospel system, I will embrace this opportunity,

1. Of establishing the principles of those who are in doubt—

[The Christian world has been much divided on the subject of faith and works: and we may easily conceive that some, who are well affected towards the Gospel, may feel a doubt, whether in our statements of the truth we do not elevate faith too high, and sink morality below its proper level. But the text, I conceive, will settle this point at once. I grant, that they who require good works in whole or in part to justify us before God, do *in appearance* shew a high sense of their value: and that they who decry them in this point of view, and declare that such a dependence on them will invalidate the whole Gospel, and sink us into perdition, do *in appearance*

[h] 1 Cor. xi. 1. the Greek. [i] 1 John iii. 3.

pearance betray an indifference towards them. But I would ask, Does any advocate for the merit of good works ever propose to himself so high a standard as that in my text? and, if any one inculcate the necessity of walking to the very uttermost as Christ walked, do they not account him "righteous over-much?" Yes assuredly, they always have a lower standard than that which is proposed to them in the Gospel. On the other hand, they who exalt the Lord Jesus Christ, and live by faith on him, will admit of no rule of conduct which does not embrace the whole law, and lead to a perfect conformity to the Lord Jesus Christ. And hence it is, that the followers of Christ are as much condemned for their unnecessary zeal and strictness, as for the *supposed* licentiousness of their principles. Here then the point is brought to the very test, which the advocates of human merit *profess* to approve. Let the two opposite systems be tried by this touchstone; 'Which requires of its votaries the sublimer and more enlarged morality?' and we consent, that this issue, fairly tried, shall determine the point for ever. They who live in any measure of self-righteousness and self-sufficiency, will walk as *the world* walketh; but they who abide in Christ as their only hope, will with all their might endeavour to walk as Christ walked.]

2. Of directing the energies of those who have embraced the Gospel—

[Be not faint or weary in well-doing: but set the Lord ever before you, and endeavour to resemble him in the whole "spirit of his *mind*," and the whole course of his *conduct*. Of course, what he spake as the Great Prophet of the Church, or did as the Redeemer of the world, was peculiar to himself, and can be no pattern for us: but in all that he either spake or did as man, we are to follow him without reserve. If we propose to ourselves any lower standard, or except any one of God's commandments from our rule or duty, we are not Christ's disciples. See what is said in our text, "He that saith he abideth in him, *ought* himself also so to walk, even as he walked:" and again in the following chapter: "Whosoever abideth in him, sinneth not. Whosoever sinneth, hath not seen him, neither known him[k]." Here then you see what all your profession of faith will amount to, if it do not approve itself by its fruits: it will be a self-delusion, and a lie altogether. Come then, Beloved, and address yourselves to your high and heavenly work. Ye see your calling: Oh! strive to "walk worthy of it," yea, "worthy of the Lord," whose you are, and whom you profess to serve. Thus will you vindicate the Gospel from the charges which ignorant and

[k] 1 John iii. 6. See also 1 John ii. 4.

and ungodly men bring against it; and will prove to all around you that it is indeed "the wisdom of God, and the power of God unto salvation."]

MCLXXX.

THE TRUE LIGHT.

1 John ii. 8. *The darkness is past and the true light now shineth.*

OUR blessed Lord is supposed by many to have enlarged the demands of the Moral Law. That he speaks of giving a New Commandment is certain: "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another[a]." St. John also speaks to the same effect in the words before my text; though, in the words immediately preceding, he had declared, that it was not a new commandment. The reconciling of this difficulty will suggest the true explanation of our text. The command given us to love our neighbour as ourselves, was *not* a new commandment. It was a part of the Moral Law[b]; and of the law originally written on the heart of man in Paradise. Yet in some respects it *was* a new law: both as it respected the Lord Jesus who enacted it, and as it respected us on whom it was enjoined. Let us hear what the Apostle himself says: "Brethren, I write no new commandment unto you, but an old commandment which ye had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which ye have heard from the beginning. Again, a new commandment I write unto you: *which thing is true in him, and in you.*" It was new *as it respected the Lord Jesus Christ*, who had proposed his own conduct as the model, (which, of course, it could not be, till he himself had completed his work on earth,) and had enforced it with his own authority as Mediator, which also must be subsequent to his entrance on the Mediatorial office. And it was new also *as it respected us*, because it was never before conceived to extend to the "laying down of our

[a] John xiii. 34. [b] Lev. xix. 18.

our lives for the Brethren[c]," and because it was enjoined with new motives, such as could never have existed before, even the testifying of our love to Christ, "who has loved us, and given himself for us." Previous to the coming of our Lord, a veil of obscurity hanged over these things: but now they were made clear, "*because* the darkness was past, and the true light now shined."

In considering the change which is here spoken of, I shall notice it,

I. As verified at that day—

The darkness of the Mosaic dispensation was then dispelled—.

[That was a dark and shadowy dispensation altogether. God himself was not made known by it as the common Father of all, but as the Friend only of one peculiar people, whom he favoured above all others. The way of acceptance with him was very indistinctly seen in the sacrifices which were offered; there being but little spoken to direct the attention of the offerers to that great sacrifice, from whence alone they derived all their efficacy. Nor were the requirements of the moral law by any means clearly revealed; the very commandments themselves consisting only of *prohibitions*, and those prohibitions extending, for the most part, only to *overt acts*. Hence Paul himself, educated as he was by the first Master of his day, and pre-eminently conversant as he was with the Mosaic writings, did not, till his eyes were opened by the Spirit of God, understand the *spiritual* import of the law, or the extent of the command, "Thou shalt not covet[d]." Besides, there were many enactments for the direction of magistrates in the administration of justice, which, when erroneously construed as rules of duty in private life, seemed to authorize revenge; as, "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth."

But our blessed Lord threw the true light on the whole of that economy. He declared plainly, that he was "come to fulfil the law," and "to give his life a ransom for many." He directed the people to look to *him* as "*the way*, by which alone any one could come to the Father; as *the truth*," in whom all the types and shadows of the law were realized; and "as the life," by whom alone any sinner in the universe could live[e]. He explained also the Moral Law, and freed it from all the glosses of the Scribes and Pharisees, by which it

[c] 1 John iii. 16. [d] Rom. vii. 7, 9. [e] John xiv. 6.

it had been obscured; declaring, that it extended to the thoughts and desires of the heart, no less than to the overt act. In particular he made known the great duty of *love*, as comprehending the whole law in all its branches, and in its utmost extent. Thus in relation both to doctrine and morals it might be truly said, that "the darkness was past, and the true light then shined."]

The darkness was also dispelled from their minds—

[All by nature are in darkness: and, even though the light shines around them, they are not able to apprehend it; "the eyes of their understanding being altogether darkened." Of all whilst in a state of unbelief it is expressly said, that "the God of this world hath blinded their eyes[f]." But by the Gospel, accompanied with power from on high, they had been "turned from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God[g]." They now acknowledged Jesus as their Saviour; and had obtained "reconciliation with God through the blood of his cross." They had now an insight into that stupendous mystery, which all "the angels in heaven are desiring to look into," the redemption of the world by the sacrifice of our incarnate God; and, together with that, had acquired just views of the state in which a redeemed sinner ought to live. In a word, they had been "brought out of darkness into marvellous light[h]." So that they were able to appreciate the necessity and the excellency of the commandment which was now enjoined.]

But let us contemplate this glorious change,

II. As fulfilled also amongst ourselves—

Certainly, the true light does shine among you—

[The Lord Jesus "Christ is fully preached among you." His person, his work, his offices are set before you. You have seen from time to time the types, as completed in their great Antitype; and the prophecies, as fulfilled in him to whom they had respect, even "Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of Joseph." The covenant of grace, which was made with him in our behalf, has been opened to you, and all the great and precious promises that are contained in it unfolded to your view. Salvation, in all its freeness, and in all its fulness, has been offered to you; and all the perfections of God, as pledged for your encouragement, have been brought in review before you. Nor has the nature of evangelical obedience been either partially or sparingly declared. The distinction between *the letter* and *the spirit* of the law has been copiously displayed; and all the high requirements of the Gospel been made known; and not declared

[f] 2 Cor. iv. 4. [g] Acts xxvi. 18. [h] 1 Pet. ii. 9.

declared only, but enforced also by every species of argument that could address itself to your understanding, your conscience, or your will. I say not, that these things have been so fully manifested as they ought to have been, or might have been: because, if my own views had been more enlarged, and my own soul been more deeply impressed with these things, my Ministrations would no doubt have been more luminous and beneficial: But this I can say, that I have "not knowingly withheld any thing that could be profitable unto you;" nor, according to the measure of light and grace given unto me, "have I shunned to declare unto you the whole counsel of God[1]." In this respect therefore I may say, that, if at any time there have been darkness here, that darkness is past: and the true light shines among you, in such a degree, at least, as is sufficient to "guide all your feet into the way of peace."]

But can it be said that the darkness is passed away from the souls of all?

[Would to God that my text were true in this extent also. Beloved Brethren, are not many of you still in the darkness, if not of Judaism itself, yet of the Judaizing teachers, who insisted on combining some obedience of their own with the merits of Christ? Are not the beauty, and glory, and excellency of our holy religion so indistinctly seen by many amongst you, that it produces scarcely any effect upon your hearts and lives? If we look at morals, are not your views of them also very imperfect? Read our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, and see whether your heart go along with it in all that it inculcates respecting patience, forbearance, meekness, forgiveness? Read St. Paul's description of love in the 13th Chapter of his First Epistle to the Corinthians, and see whether that be the standard at which you aim, and by which you estimate your attainments? Have you any idea of your duty to your Brethren requiring, that, if it may subserve their spiritual and eternal interests, you should lay down your life for them? I will not ask what *speculative* notions you may have of these things; for in that respect your views may be correct enough: but what is your practice? it is by *that* that your character must be tried: and, when tried by that, say whether you are not found altogether wanting. That there is great danger of self-deceit in reference to this matter, is clear from what the Apostle says in the very words following my text: "He that *saith he is in the light* and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now. He that loveth his brother, abideth in the light; and there is none occasion of stumbling in him; but he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded

[1] Acts xx. 20, 27.

blinded his eyes[k]." You perceive that a man may be very confident that he is in the light; and yet be so defective in respect of love, as to be in utter darkness, and going he knows not whither. I pray you, guard against so fatal a delusion as this; and never conceive yourselves to be "children of light," till your whole spirit and temper, candidly examined, attest that you are "walking as children of the light[l]."]

It may be that you would wish to have two QUESTIONS solved.

With answering them, I will conclude the subject.

1. How shall I obtain the change spoken of in the text?

[Many directions I might give you; and all proper in their place: but there is one, which, if it do not supersede all others, will at least prove amply sufficient for this occasion. Our blessed Lord says, "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life[m]." Here the direction is from such authority as cannot be withstood, and at the same time so complete, that, if followed, it cannot but succeed. In truth, all other directions, in comparison of this, are like advising persons to light a taper of their own, when they might come forth at once to the noon-day sun. By the Lord Jesus Christ the whole darkness, whether from without or from within, shall be dispersed at once. The nature and perfections of God, the spirituality and extent of the law, the use of the whole of the Mosaic ritual, together with the whole work of Redemption, will all be made visible as the light itself, to one who obtains just views of Christ. The whole system of morals too will be rendered clear and luminous; and all the sublime motives and encouragements to obedience be reflected with irresistible efficacy upon the soul. This then I say; Go to the Lord Jesus Christ: follow him: contemplate him; believe in him as having in himself all fulness for the supply of those who trust in him: and you shall soon "be guided into all truth," and experience in the richest abundance the glory and blessedness of his salvation.]

2. How shall I improve that change, supposing it to have been wrought within me?

[This is a question which every child of light should ask: and, as our blessed Lord answered the former, so shall the apostle Paul answer this. Speaking to persons who were truly enlightened, he says, "Ye are all the children of the light and of the day: we are not of the night nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be

[k] ver. 11—13. [l] Eph. v. 8. [m] John viii. 12.

be sober: for they that sleep, sleep in the night; and they that be drunken, are drunken in the night: but let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breast-plate of faith and love, and for an helmet the hope of salvation[n]." You can easily perceive that a change of views should be followed by a corresponding change of conduct; and, consequently, that henceforth you should "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them[o]." The mercy vouchsafed to you, has not been given for yourselves alone, but for others also; before whom you ought to "shine as lights in a dark place[p]," yea so to shine, that all who "behold your light may be constrained to glorify your Father that is in heaven."]

[n] 1 Thess. v. 5—8. [o] Eph. v. 11. [p] Phil. ii. 15, 16.

DCLXXXI.

THE DIFFERENT GROWTH AND PRIVILEGES OF GOD'S CHILDREN.

1 John ii. 12—14. *I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake. I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one. I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father. I have written unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one.*

THE word of God is intended for every individual of mankind, that all, being acquainted with their own state, may know what God says respecting them. On this account it is the duty of Ministers to mark with accuracy the discriminating features of every character, and, by "rightly dividing the word of truth," to "give to every one his portion in due season." St. John affords us a good example with respect to this: for, not content with "separating the precious from the vile," he arranges the saints themselves into distinct classes, according to their several attainments, and declares to each those peculiar marks wherein they differ from each other.

There

There is indeed a tautology in this place, such as does not occur in any other part of the Inspired Volume. Whether this was intended, or whether a considerable part of the thirteenth verse was inserted by the mistake of an early transcriber, we cannot say: but the whole of that verse, except the last clause, might be omitted without any loss, because every word in it is repeated afterwards.

Our intention is simply to address the several classes of Christians here specified; first drawing their respective characters, and then setting before them their distinctive privileges and attainments.

I. We speak to "you, little children"—

[In order to come under this title, it is necessary that you should have been "begotten with the incorruptible seed, the Word of God," and been brought into God's family by the renewing influences of his Spirit. It is not supposed that you have grown to any stature in the family of Christ, but, on the contrary, that you have either recently "come out of darkness into the marvellous light of the Gospel," or, at least, made very little advance in the Divine life. You are, however, born again. Ye have seen your guilt and helplessness; you have fled to Christ for refuge: you have sought for mercy through the blood and righteousness of your incarnate God. You have obtained a new nature: and, though you are yet weak in all your faculties and all your powers, there is no part in you that is wholly unrenewed. Your understanding, though dark, is enlightened with some rays from the Sun of righteousness. Your affections, though far from pure, are yet, on the whole, turned to God, and heavenly things. The Divine Image, though far from perfect, is, in a measure, formed upon your souls; so that it already appears whose you are, by the resemblance which you bear to your heavenly Father.

Hear then the privileges which belong to you. In the first place, we declare from God himself, that "your sins are forgiven you." Whatever they may have been, however numerous, however heinous, (God makes no distinction, nor can we presume to make any,) they are all "blotted out of the book of God's remembrance," nor shall so much as one of them ever appear in judgment against you. From the first moment that you believed in Christ, and became truly regenerate, this was your happy portion: you were not to wait for it till a life of holiness should confirm your title to it: a free and full pardon was yours, the very instant you became

a child

a child of God. But remember for whose sake this pardon has been bestowed upon you. It has not been for your own sake; for you deserved nothing but wrath; yea, if God at this moment were to enter into judgment with you according to your present deserts, you must inevitably perish. God has had respect to his dear Son: and "for HIS sake" has forgiven you. The pardon you enjoy, was bought with the precious blood of Christ. It is altogether on account of what Christ has done and suffered for you, that you have found acceptance. "There is no other *name* given under heaven whereby you, or any other sinner, can be saved, but the name of Jesus Christ."

Further, it is said of you, that "ye have known the Father." Your views of the Gospel are at present very partial, and confused. You merely see that you were sinners before God: and that God, in infinite mercy, sent his only begotten Son to die for you; and that through the death of Christ you are to obtain mercy. Hence you are emboldened to look unto God as reconciled to you in Christ Jesus; and with a spirit of adoption to cry, Abba, Father. Thus, though you see as yet but little of the work and offices of Christ, you know the Father as a just, yet merciful, and gracious God.]

II. We would next address "you, young men"—

[As in the natural world children grow up to manhood, so in the spiritual world there is a similar progress to maturity. We might proceed to draw the necessary distinctions between your infantile and adult state: but the privileges annexed to your state in the words of our text, will serve at the same time to mark the progress which you have made in the Divine life; and therefore we shall confine ourselves to them.

You then are declared to be "strong:" and in this you differ widely from your former state: for whereas you formerly were liable to be "tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine," and to be overcome by every temptation, you now have obtained a stability both in knowledge and in grace. Not that you are stronger *in yourselves* than you were formerly: but you have learned how weak you are; and have been led to rely wholly on the Lord Jesus Christ; and "through him have been enabled to do" what, in your self-confident state, you were unable to perform. Hence "ye are strong; but it is in the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and in the power of his might." Your conscious weakness is the means of your strength. You can say with the Apostle, "when I am weak, then am I strong."

It is characteristic of your state also, that "the word of God abideth in you." When you were children, you knew

but

but little of the word of God; but you have studied it: you have "desired it, and delighted in it, as unadulterated milk; and by means of it have grown up" to maturity. You have found that there is no weapon so powerful as that. You have learned, not only from the Saviour's example, but from your own experience, that one single arrow taken out of that quiver is sufficient to vanquish all the hosts of hell. Hence you have been led to treasure up the promises in your memory; and to have recourse to the Inspired Volume for direction and support in every emergency.

Further, it is said, that "you have overcome the wicked one." In your earlier days Satan beguiled and vanquished you in ten thousand instances; but now you have attained the knowledge of his devices. He himself, if we may so speak, has at last taught you how to repel his assaults, and to resist him with success. You are become expert in the spiritual warfare. You know how to wield "the sword of the Spirit." You know when and where to expect your enemy. You know the way in which he manages his assaults. And you have learned to combat him upon your knees. This, though a disadvantageous posture in earthly conflicts, you have found to be the best that can possibly be resorted to in the spiritual warfare. Hence you have had the comfort of seeing that wicked fiend, who assaulted you with the subtlety of a serpent, and the fury of a roaring lion, flee from your face intimidated and confounded[a].

O remember these your high privileges, and labour continually to walk worthy of them!———]

III. Lastly, we would speak to you also who are "fathers" in Christ—

[As age and experience elevate a man to a higher rank in the community than he possessed while in the vigour of his youth, so it is in the Church of God. Not that age, or even long continuance in the Church of Christ, can entitle a man to the appellation of "father:" for some are not born to God till they are far advanced in life; and others, through carnality or sloth, have made so little progress in religion, that they have need to be treated as babes, when, for the time that they have professed godliness, they ought to have attained the age and stature of fathers[b]. Those only are deserving of this honourable name, who have maintained a long and successful conflict with the powers of darkness.

Respecting you then it is said, that "ye have known him that is from the beginning." Whom he intended to designate under this expression, the Apostle himself tells us: it is Christ, who "was in the beginning with God, and was God."

[a] Jam. iv. 7. [b] 1 Cor. iii. 1. 2. Heb. v. 12.

God[c]." Now the distinction between you and young men principally consists in this; that by your numerous conflicts you have been compelled to make use of Christ in all his offices, and have thereby attained a more extensive knowledge of his love and mercy, his power and grace, his truth and faithfulness. From your own experience therefore you can trust in him yourselves, and can exhort others also to trust in him with the most unlimited confidence, and to glory in him as their "all in all."

See then, fathers, that ye improve your knowledge for this end: and soon ye shall "see him as ye are seen, and know him as ye are known"———]

APPLICATION,

1. To those who are included under any of the foregoing titles—

[Let the least and meanest in God's family rejoice in the unspeakable blessings vouchsafed unto them. But let not the most advanced imagine, that they are not yet to proceed to higher attainments. All must "war a good warfare;" all must seek to "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus:" all must "be faithful unto death, if ever they would obtain a crown of life."]

2. To those who have never yet been brought into the family of God—

[Dearly Beloved, the forgiveness of sins is the *exclusive* privilege of God's children. This is manifestly implied in the address to little children. O then seek to be made new creatures in Christ Jesus! Our Lord tells you repeatedly that "you MUST be born again:" and that, "if you be not, you never can enter into the kingdom of heaven." Pray then that you may "be born of the Spirit;" and that you may be interested in the Redeemer's death. So shall you be numbered with the Children of God, and be made partakers of their inheritance for evermore.]

[c] Compare John i. 1. with 1 John i. 1.

MCLXXXII.

LOVE OF THE WORLD FORBIDDEN.

1 John ii. 15—17. *Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, is not of*

of the Father, but is of the world; and the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.

WHATEVER our attainments may be in the Divine life, we still need the voice of warning and exhortation, to keep us from the evils to which we are exposed. As Believers, we have been brought out of "a world which lieth in wickedness:" but still we are encompassed with temptations, and bear about with us a corrupt nature which is ever liable to be ensnared by them. In persons most advanced in the Divine life "the flesh lusteth against the spirit, as well as the spirit against the flesh; so that they cannot do all that they would;" and may be easily seduced to do things, which, according to their better judgment, they would not.

The Apostle has been addressing the whole Christian Church according to their age and stature in the Divine life, under the names of Little Children, Young Men, and Fathers: and now, to the one as well as to the other of these classes, he gives the injunction in our text. Let all classes therefore amongst *you* also receive the word as addressed personally to yourselves, whilst we consider,

I. The injunction here given—

There are few subjects, if any, in the whole course of our Ministrations, that require a more careful and temperate discussion than that before us. The solemnity with which it is introduced, and the extraordinary emphasis with which it is impressed on our minds, evince beyond a doubt the great importance of it: whilst, as if it were of no importance whatever, or there were no danger of erring in relation to it, every one puts the construction upon it which suits his own habits and inclinations, and takes for granted that his views of it are correct. But the truth is, that there is in this subject a need for the nicest discrimination, lest, on the one hand, we make the prohibition more strict than Jehovah himself intended it to be; or, on the other hand, give to it a latitude which is contrary to his mind, and ruinous to all who prac-

practically adopt it. A man who lives in monastic seclusion will be ready to say, that this passage forbids all intercourse with the world: whilst a person living in an unrestrained commerce with the world, will see in it nothing that condemns the most unrestrained compliance with the maxims and habits of the world, provided they be not palpably and grossly immoral. In like manner they will differ as widely respecting the *extent* of the prohibition as the *object* of it; the one supposing that every degree of inclination towards the world is forbidden; the other, thinking himself at liberty to "wallow in earthly indulgences as a sow in the mire[a]." It is obvious therefore that we should enter on this subject with extreme caution; determining with the greatest care,

1. The import of the terms—

[What are we to understand by "*the world?*" In answer to this question, I should say, It comprehends *all the things of time and sense*, as standing in opposition to the things which relate to a better world. The apostle Paul suggests to us this very distinction, when he says that we are to "look, not at the things which are seen and are temporal, but at the things which are not seen and eternal[b]." This will appear more clear, whilst we consider what is meant by "*loving*" the world. We are *not* to understand *every degree of attachment* to it, but only *such a degree as is inordinate*, and *such a degree as puts its object in competition with the things which are invisible and eternal.* Amongst the things of time and sense must be reckoned a man's intercourse with his own family. Shall we then say, that a man ought to have *no* pleasure in the society of his own wife and children? Such an absurdity carries its own refutation along with it. Hence then I take the term, not in a positive, but comparative, sense; and regard it as importing, that we are not to give to any object of time and sense that *kind* or *measure* of affection which is due only to things of eternal moment.

The Apostle's own explanation of his meaning will throw further light on this matter. "The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life," are very generally understood as importing all those things which administer to sensual gratification; and those things which, when beheld, are apt to fascinate us with their attractions; and those things which men

[a] 1 Pet. ii. 22. [b] 2 Cor. iv. 18.

men chiefly affect, as elevating them in the estimation of mankind; or, in other words, *pleasure*, and *riches*, and *honour*. And if to these we apply what was before specified as implied in the term "love," we shall be prepared to determine with very considerable accuracy,]

2. The extent of the prohibition—

[The word "*love*" comprehends three things; esteem, desire, and delight: and, if we apply it in this extent to the various things above mentioned, we shall, I think, understand with clearness the Apostle's meaning in our text. Some measure of love, I again say, the things of this world are entitled to: they may be *esteemed*, as gifts from a gracious God; they may be *desired*, as means of honouring him, and benefiting our fellow-creatures; and they may be delighted in, as conducive to our comfort when rightly improved: for "*God has given us all things richly to enjoy*[c]." But,

They are not to be esteemed, as though they possessed any intrinsic good. They are all in themselves empty, vain, perishing, and utterly incapable of administering any real comfort to the soul, or even of benefiting us at all, any farther than God shall be pleased to make use of them for that end.

They are not to be desired so as in the least degree to interfere with our pursuit of higher and better things. "Our affections are to be set upon things above, and not on things on the earth[d]." The two cannot, and must not, be put in competition with each other. The one, how dear soever in itself, must be despised and *hated* in comparison of the other: father, mother, wife, children, yea and our own life also, must be of no account with us, if they at all stand in our way of serving and honouring our God[e]. His claims are paramount to every other; and there is nothing either in heaven or on earth to be desired in comparison of him[f].

They are not to be delighted in, as things in which, to whatever extent they were multiplied, we could be satisfied with taking up our rest. Job seems to have had singularly clear and just views of this subject: "If," says he, "I have made gold my hope, or have said to the fine gold, Thou art my confidence; *if I rejoiced because my wealth was great, and because mine hand had gotten much*; this were an iniquity to be punished by the Judge, for then I should have denied the God that is above[g]." Whoever he be that, on account of his earthly comfort, says, "Soul, take thine ease," is justly branded as "a fool," and to all eternity will find occasion to bewail his folly.]

With

[c] 1 Tim. vi. 17. [d] Col. iii. 2. [e] Luke xiv. 26.
[f] Ps. lxxiii. 25. [g] Job xxxi. 24, 25, 28.

With the help of these distinctions I think we may fix, with some precision, the true import of the injunction before us, and may proceed in a satisfactory manner to consider further,

II. The reasons with which it is enforced—

In confirmation of what he says respecting the world, the Apostle declares,

1. That it is not worthy of our love—

[If we look at *its nature*, how *base* is it! "it is not of the Father, but of the world." What is there in the whole circle of the world that can boast of an heavenly origin? Nothing: not an atom of it either comes from God, or leads to God, any farther than it is sanctified unto us by the covenant of grace. It is enjoyed by Heathens, as well as by Christians: and what does it do for them? Yea, what does it advance the real welfare of the great mass of the Christian world? It altogether arose out of the fall of man. In Paradise, the world was nothing; and God was all. It was not till sin had entered into the world, that the world and its lusts were put in competition with God, or that a love to present things had attained an undue ascendant over the soul. And were man still in his primæval innocence, all pleasures, riches, and honours would be of no account, any farther than God was enjoyed in them, and they were made subservient to his glory.

Again; if we look at *its duration*, it is altogether *transient*: "the fashion of this world passeth away, and the lust thereof; but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever." What has the lover of this world of all that he has ever enjoyed? and how long will the savour of his present enjoyments abide with him? How long can he secure the continuance of them? and what will remain of them the moment he has departed hence? On the other hand, if he love God, and do his will, he has a continual feast: his gratifications never cloy: his bliss will bear reflection, and be renewed by the retrospect: the consciousness that he has *a taste* for such enjoyments will itself be a source of very sublime happiness; of a happiness which he will possess under the most afflictive circumstances, and which will soothe even the pangs of death itself: and this source of enjoyment, instead of being confined to this present life, will be infinitely enlarged, and afford inexhaustible supplies of bliss to all eternity.

Say then, Brethren, Whether this world is worthy of a Christian's affections? I do not hesitate to say, It is not: for it affords nothing that is capable of satisfying an immortal soul;

soul; and the poor gratifications it does afford, are all perishing even whilst they are in our hands [h].]

2. That a love to it is absolutely incompatible with love to God—

[How solemn is the declaration, "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him?" This, if delivered on *man*'s authority, might be deemed uncharitable; but it is declared on the authority of God himself: and a very little reflection will convince us of the truth of it. Can any man conceive that an angel, if sent down from heaven to sojourn here for a time, would set his affections on things below? no: we are well assured, that he would have far juster views of earthly vanities, than to set his heart upon them: his taste would be too refined for such gross aliment. He would fulfil the duties that were assigned him, whatever they might be: but his heart would be with God; with God supremely, and with God alone. Thus then it should be with us: and thus it *must* be, if we be Christians indeed: for "we cannot serve God and Mammon [i]:" "the very friendship of the world is enmity with God." As the will or desire to serve the king's enemies, if it were clearly proved, would constitute us traitors to our king and country, even though we had not succeeded in our efforts, so the very *will and desire* to be the friends of the world is itself sufficient to prove and "*constitute us* enemies of God [k]." As the love of God grows in the soul, the love of the world abates: and, as the love of the world revives, the love of God decays: the two are as opposite to each other as light and darkness: and neither can prevail but by the expulsion of the other.

Here then, again I ask, Is not here abundant reason for the injunction in my text? If the love of God and of the world could exist together, there were some reason for harbouring both: but as they are in direct and unalterable opposition to each other, we cannot but unite with the Apostle in this salutary admonition, "Love not the world."]

Whilst, however, I cordially unite in this sentiment, I would *add*,

1. Be careful in passing judgment upon others—

[There is scarcely any subject on which men are so prone to exercise a censorious disposition as this. They are ready to make their own habits, or at all events their own views, a standard for others: and the more strict any persons are in relation to themselves, the more apt they are to pass an uncharitable

[h] Col. ii. 22. [i] Matt. vi. 24.
[k] Jam. iv. 4. See the remarkable force of the expression in the Greek.

charitable judgment upon others. But we are not capable of judging rightly for others, unless we can put ourselves exactly into their situation. A person in lower life has little conception of what may be proper for a person of opulence and distinction. Besides, there are a thousand circumstances which may produce somewhat of a diversity of conduct in persons of equal rank and station. Persons in an inferior station are ready to think that the possession of things that are valuable or splendid, is wrong: but the text does not say, that we must not *possess* the world; for we may possess crowns and kingdoms: nor does it say that we may not *use* the world, or even *find pleasure* in it: for we may use it, and find pleasure in it too; since, as has been before observed, God has "given us all things to *enjoy*, and *richly* to enjoy." The prohibition relates to *the heart and the affections*, which are not to be set on the world, or on any thing in it, *in comparison of God*. And who can judge *the heart?* The man who lives in a palace may have far less *love* to the world, than his censorious neighbour that is living in a cottage. Let us judge *ourselves* as severely as we please: but let us leave *our neighbour* to be judged by him who knows the heart. "To his own Master he standeth or falleth:" the rule for us to walk by is plain enough: "Judge not, that ye be not judged."]

2. Be firm and determined in your own course—

[What you *are* to love, is here plainly declared: "The love of the Father" is put in opposition to the love of the world: and "the doing of God's will," in opposition to the seeking of any transient enjoyment. Let this then be your care, "even to *love* and *serve*, not the creature, but the Creator alone[1]." Here you need fear no excess. On the contrary, as the prohibition extends to the world and to *all that is in it*, so the command of loving God extends to him, and to *all that is in him;* his whole mind, his whole will, all his perfections, all his purposes, all his dispensations. In this respect you may learn of wordly men. See how faithful they are in their adherence to the world; how active in its cause, how laborious in its pursuits, how immersed in its enjoyments, how insatiable in their desires after its richest communications. And, if you tell them that they are seeking after a mere phantom, they account you either splenetic or mad. Be ye then firm against those who would deride your pursuit of heavenly objects; and serve *your* God, as they serve *theirs*, wholly, uninterruptedly, and in defiance of all that can be said to turn you from your ways. In a word, "Be stedfast, immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord;" and know, that when *they* shall reap only vanity for their recompence, *you* shall find that your labour has not been in vain in the Lord."]

[1] Rom. i. 25.

MCLXXXIII.

THE FRUITS AND EFFECTS OF HOPE.

1 John iii. 3. *Every one that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself, even as he is pure.*

THE people of God are but little known to an ungodly world: instead of being considered according to their true character, they are regarded as hypocrites, enthusiasts, and disturbers of their brethren's peace. But this is easily accounted for: the world know not God; and therefore it is no wonder that they know not his people. But the saints themselves have a very inadequate conception of the honour that is put on them, or of the glory that is reserved for them. They know indeed that they are sons of God; but they have very little idea of what is comprehended in that relation: and as to their eternal state, they can form no precise judgment respecting it; they only know, in the general, that they shall be like God, and be with him for ever. Yet, though so little known to the world and to themselves, they have marks whereby they may be clearly distinguished; they may be known by their uniform endeavours after holiness. To this effect the Apostle speaks in the words before us; from which we shall take occasion to consider,

I. The Christian's hope—

Christ is the fountain and foundation of a sinner's hope: Without Christ, all must have perished: nor has the most eminent saint any more hope than a fallen angel, except as he is interested in the merits of Christ. But through *him*[a] the Believer has a glorious hope;

1. That he is a child of God—

[Christ, having purchased us with his own blood, has reconciled us to God, and made us his children. He teaches his followers to consider themselves as standing in this relation to God, not merely like the angels who are his sons by creation, but in a more exalted manner by regeneration and adoption:

[a] The text does not say, ἐν ἑαυτῷ in himself, but ἐπ' αὐτῷ in *him*, that is, in Christ.

adoption: and he teaches them to expect from him throughout their whole lives the blessing suited to that high dignity ———[b].

Now the true Christian hopes that he is brought into this happy state, and that he shall receive from God all those endearing tokens of affection which the relation of sonship emboldens him to expect. This hope of his is founded partly on the merits of his Saviour, and partly on the internal evidence which he has, that he is interested in the Saviour. The mere circumstance of Christ having laid down his life for him, would not be a sufficient ground for him to number himself among the family of God: but when he has the testimony of his own conscience that he has sought acceptance with God through the death of Christ, then he is enabled to indulge a hope that the privileges annexed to such a state belong to him.]

2. That he shall be with God, and like him, for ever—

[The blessings which the saints enjoy are not confined to this life: "Being sons of God, they are also heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ[c]." "Though they know not yet what they shall be, they know that, when they shall see him, they shall be like him: for they shall see him as he is[d]." The time is coming, when they shall all be introduced into his immediate presence, and be with him, and like him for ever. This also is an object of the Christian's hope ——— He believes that this is the heritage of the saints; and that "what God hath promised, he is able, and willing, to fulfil."]

That this is no barren hope, will appear from,

II. The effect it produces in him—

Every Christian will endeavour to purify himself to the uttermost—

[The Christian cannot wilfully live in any known sin: he will search out his corruptions, in order to subdue them; and his duties, in order to fulfil them ——— He will propose to himself the Lord Jesus Christ as his pattern: and though he can never hope to attain absolute perfection in this life, he will not rest satisfied with any thing short of that. He would gladly be "holy as God is holy, and perfect, even as his Father in heaven is perfect." He considers how the Lord Jesus acted in reference to his God: how in reference to man; and what tempers he manifested in the whole of his deportment; ——— then he labours to follow *his* example, and to "walk in all things as he walked."]

To

[b] ver. 1. John i. 12, 13. Matt. vi. 6, 8, 9, 31, 32, 33.
[c] Rom. viii. 15—17. [d] ver. 2.

To these endeavours he will be stimulated by his hope in Christ:

[He cannot endure to think himself a child of God, and yet act like a child of the devil: he cannot please himself with a prospect of enjoying and resembling God in a future life, without seeking communion with him and a resemblance to him in the present world. He will feel himself impelled to holiness by *a sense of duty*[e]; by *a sense of gratitude*[f]; yea, moreover, by *a love of holiness itself*[g] ———

We must not however imagine that it is by any power of his own that he thus "purifies himself;" the duty and the exertion are his[h]: but the power, both to will and to do, proceeds from God alone[i].]

We shall improve this subject,

1. For conviction—

[All profess to have a hope in Christ: but before we conclude that to be well-founded, we must examine what fruits it produces: Are we seeking after universal holiness? Are we contented with no measure of holiness short of perfection itself? Are we setting the Lord Jesus before us, and taking him for our pattern in all our tempers, and in our conduct towards God and man? This is the criterion by which St. John himself teaches us to judge of our hope[k]: and St. James confirms it—by declaring, that, if in any one point (the not bridling of our tongue, for instance) we allowedly deviate from this path, our religion is vain[l]. O consider this, lest your hope be only as the spider's web, that will be swept away with the besom of destruction!]

2. For encouragement—

[Though we must not think our hope well founded, unless it produce in us the fruits of righteousness, yet we must not imagine that our righteousness is to be *the ground* of our hope, or even *our warrant* to hope in Christ. The only ground of our hope must be found in Christ, and in the promises which God has made to those who believe in him. We must go to Christ *as sinners;* and then he will enable us to live *as saints.* This distinction is clearly marked in the text: our hope in Christ is to precede, not to follow, the purification of our hearts: and our holiness is to be the fruit, not the root, of our hope. The same distinction is made by St. Paul also, who, having spoken of our sonship with God, says, "Having therefore

[e] He knows he cannot be saved in any other way. Ps. xxiv. 3, 4. Matt. v. 8. Heb. xii. 14. Rev. xxi. 27.

[f] 1 Thess. ii. 12. 2 Cor. v. 14, 15.

[g] Ps. cxix. 128.

[h] Jam. iv. 8.

[i] Phil. ii. 13.

[k] ver. 6—10.

[l] Jam. i. 26.

fore these promises, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God[m]." We must not wait till we are cleansed, and then embrace the promises: but first embrace the promises; and then make use of them for the cleansing of our souls.

What encouragement does this afford to those who feel the corruption of their hearts, and who, if their own purity were to be *the foundation* of their hope, would be in utter despair! Go then, how polluted soever ye are, and seek pardon and sanctification at the hands of Jesus; and you shall find him "faithful and just, to forgive you your sins, and to cleanse you from all unrighteousness[n]."]

[m] 2 Cor. vii. 1. See the same also by St. Peter, 2 Pet. i. 4.
[n] 1 John i. 9.

MCLXXXIV.

CHRIST MANIFESTED TO TAKE AWAY SIN.

1 John iii. 5. *Ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins: and in him is no sin.*

AMONGST the numberless advantages which the light of revelation has conferred upon us, one of particular importance is, the strength of the motives which it suggests to us for the mortification of sin. A Heathen could devise no argument beyond what related to our own welfare and that of society at large. But Christianity discovers to us wonders, of which unassisted reason could form no conception: it declares to us, that Almighty God himself assumed our nature for the express purpose of counteracting the effects of sin, and of destroying its power. To those therefore who have embraced Christianity, here is an argument that is wholly irresistible, if once it be admitted into the mind, and suffered to have its due operation upon the soul. St. John avails himself of it in the passage before us. He is shewing to the Christian world that they must aspire after universal holiness, and purify themselves "even as their incarnate God was pure:" And the more effectually to enforce his exhortations, he makes this unanswerable appeal to all of them without exception: "Ye know

know that he was manifested to take away our sins; and in him was no sin."

The destruction of sin being the great scope and end of our Ministry also, we will,

I. Open to you his appeal—

The great end of our Saviour's incarnation was to take away sin—

[Sin had separated man from God, and God from man[a]: nor was it possible that they should be re-united in mutual love and amity, unless this evil were removed. But removed it could not be, either as to its guilt or power, by any efforts of man: nor could all the angels in heaven render to him any effectual aid. God therefore of his own love and mercy "laid help for us upon One that was mighty[b]," even upon his co-equal, co-eternal Son, whom he sent into the world on this benevolent errand, to "put away our sins by the sacrifice of himself[c]," and to "subdue our iniquities" by the efficacy of his grace[d].

For this the Lord Jesus Christ was well fitted, by reason of his own spotless character. This I conceive to be particularly intimated in our text. The connexion between the two clauses of the text does not at first sight appear; but we apprehend, that the mention of the spotless character of Jesus is intended to convey this idea, namely, that, being himself without sin, he was fitted for the work assigned him; and could present to God such an offering as our necessities required. Under the law it was especially appointed, that the sacrifices should be without spot or blemish. The Paschal lamb was set apart four days before it was offered, on purpose that it might be scrutinized to the uttermost, and thus be proved fit for its destined use[e]. The Lord Jesus too went up to Jerusalem four days before his crucifixion, and underwent the strictest examination at different tribunals, and was declared innocent, by Pilate his judge, by his fellow-sufferer on the cross, by the Centurion who presided at his execution: all his enemies thus unwittingly attesting, that he was indeed "a Lamb without blemish and without spot[f]," and that, being "just himself," he was every way fit to "suffer in the place of us the unjust[g]."

In another view too his spotless character subserves this great end of his mission: for, "being without guile himself, he has set us a perfect example:" and the best possible way of avoiding

[a] Isai. lix. 2. [b] Ps. lxxxix. 19. [c] Heb. ix. 26.
[d] Mich. vii. 19. [e] Exod. xii. 3, 6. [f] 1 Pet. i. 19.
[g] 1 Pet. iii. 18.

avoiding sin is, to imitate his example, and to "tread in his steps [h]."]

This was known and acknowledged through the whole Christian world—

[No one who believed in Christ was ignorant of the end for which he had come into the world. Hence the Apostle could appeal to all without exception; and could say, "*Ye know* that he was manifested to take away our sins." The whole Scriptures bore testimony to this. All the types of the Mosaic law shadowed it forth. All the prophecies from the beginning of the world attested it. It was in this way that "the Seed of the woman was to bruise the serpent's head." "To finish transgression, to make an end of sin," and to establish universal righteousness, *this* was to be the work that should distinguish his reign: "A sceptre of righteousness was to be the sceptre of his kingdom." The very name that was given to him imported this: "he was called Jesus, because he was to save his people from their sins."]

This truth being acknowledged by all at this time, no less than in the Apostolic age, we shall make the same APPEAL to you; and,

II. Found upon it a particular Address—

As Christians you all "*know*" that Christ came to deliver you from sin: but do you all *consider* it, as you ought?

1. Ye who live in wilful and habitual sin—

[Do you consider what has been done to rescue you from your bondage? Do you consider that the Son of the living God, "Jehovah's fellow," the Creator of the universe, has come down from heaven, and assumed your nature, and died upon the cross for your Redemption? Ask yourselves then, Whether he would have done this, if sin had been so small an evil as you judge it to be? Can you conceive that such means would have been used for your recovery, if the state into which sin had brought you was not beyond measure terrible? Had no misery awaited you, or a misery only that was light and transient, do you suppose that God would have had recourse to such a method of delivering you from it; or that, after he has used *such* means to *take away* your sin, you incur no danger by *holding it fast?* You may "make a mock of sin," if you please; but you will not think so lightly of it when you come to stand in the presence of your Judge. When the Lord Jesus Christ shall remind you of what he endured

[h] 1 Pet. ii. 21, 22.

endured to deliver you from it, What will ye say to him? Will ye then make the foolish excuses that ye now do? No, verily: your mouths will then be shut: you will be amazed and confounded at your present folly and impiety: and it will be no consolation to you then that there are so many in the same condemnation with yourself. The antediluvian scoffers, when warned of the approaching deluge, thought it impossible that such a judgment should ever be inflicted; or consoled themselves perhaps, that they should be in no worse plight than others. But when the deluge actually came, did they find their own terrors less appalling, or their sufferings less acute, because they were endured by others also? Nor will ye in that day find the wrath of God a whit more tolerable because of the multitudes that shall bear it with you. Had the Saviour never come, you would have had to endure the wrath *of God;* but since he has come, and been despised and rejected by you, your shall have to bear "the wrath of *the Lamb*[i]," even of that Lamb whom you "crucified afresh[k]:" and hell itself will be sevenfold more terrible, in consequence of the means which have been used to deliver you from it. Yes, the punishment of Sodom and Gomorrha will be light in comparison of yours[l]. Oh that you were wise, and would consider this, ere it be too late!]

2. Ye who found your hopes of mercy on your own self-righteous endeavours—

[What can ye think of yourselves, when ye recollect the principles which you yourselves acknowledge? You know that Christ was manifested to take away your sins: how then do you presume to imagine, that you can remove them by any efforts of your own? Is there any such virtue in your own tears or almsdeeds, that you will rely on them, rather than on the atoning blood of Christ? Or is there any such strength in your own resolutions, that you will trust to them for the subduing of sin, rather than to the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ? Does it never strike you, that whilst you are entertaining such proud thoughts as these, you are thrusting the Lord Jesus Christ from his office, and virtually declaring, that, whatever he may be to others, he shall be no Saviour to you? Why will ye thus presume to set aside the very ends for which He came into the world? Why, when he has actually girded himself with the towel, and presented himself before you, will you say with Peter, "Thou shalt never wash *my* feet!" Know you not, that "unless he wash you, you have no part with him[m]!" Be assured, he never came to make you your own Saviours, but to offer you a free and full salvation.

[i] Rev. vi. 16.
[k] Heb. vi. 6.
[l] Matt. x. 15.
[m] John xiii. 4, 8.

salvation. And if you will conceit yourselves to be "rich and increased in goods, and in need of nothing, when you are wretched and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked," nothing remains for you but to reap the bitter fruits of your pride and folly[n]———]

3. Ye who, whilst ye profess to believe in Christ, are walking unworthy of your holy profession—

[I call on you also to consider this subject. You profess that the Lord Jesus Christ has borne your sins, and that you therefore expect that no condemnation shall come upon you. But do you think that he will be satisfied with performing half his office? Do you suppose that he will take away your sins as far as relates to their guilt, and leave them unmortified as it respects their power? This he never will do: and he declares to you that he never will. Only hear how strongly St. John speaks on this subject in the words following my text: "Whosoever abideth in Christ, (as you profess to do,) sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him. Little children, let no man deceive you. He that doeth righteousness, (as you profess to do,) is righteous, even as he is righteous. He that committeth sin is of the devil[o]." What now will ye say, who are still under the dominion of pride, envy, malice, wrath, and whose conduct in your families, instead of exhibiting the image of the Lord Jesus, and constraining all to admire the excellence of vital godliness, causes religion to stink in the nostrils? What will ye say who have lewd hearts and licentious tongues? or ye who are covetous and worldly-minded, and who are in such bad repute for truth and honesty, that men would rather deal with a worldly character than with you? Ye may boast as ye will about the freeness and fulness of the Gospel salvation; but ye shall never taste of it, unless ye "put off the old man with his deeds, and put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness[p]."]

4. Ye who are bowed down with desponding fears—

[I must not overlook you; for the text speaks powerfully to you also. In the habit of your minds you are saying, "My sins are too great to be forgiven; or, my lusts are too strong to be subdued." But is Christ unable to effect the work he has undertaken? Was he manifested to take away your sins, and has he proved incompetent to the task? Are we not told that "the blood of Jesus Christ will cleanse from all sin?" And that "his grace is sufficient" for all who trust in

[n] Rev. iii. 16, 17. See also Rom. ix. 31, 32. & x. 3.
[o] ver. 6—8. [p] Eph. iv. 22—24.

in him? What then is there in your case that renders you an exception? Oh, do not so dishonour your adorable Saviour, as to doubt his sufficiency for the work that has been assigned him. Know that his blood is a sufficient "propitiation, not for your sins only, but also for the sins of the whole world;" and the weakest creature in the universe is authorized to say, "I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me." Put away then your unbelieving fears; and look to him to "accomplish in you all the good pleasure of his goodness." So shall you find that "he is able to save you to the uttermost;" and soon you shall join in that blessed song, "To Him that loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and our Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen[q]."]

[q] Rev. i. 5, 6.

MCLXXXV.

THE END OF CHRIST'S INCARNATION.

1 John iii. 8. *For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.*

THE author of this Epistle survived all the other Apostles; so that, long before his death, the professed followers of Christ had had ample opportunity of shewing what the effects of religious principle would be, after that the impulse of novelty should have ceased: in some the sacred fire would burn with undiminished ardour; but in others it would languish so as to leave room to doubt whether it were not altogether extinguished. Hence, in this General Epistle, St. John lays down a variety of marks, whereby men might judge of their state before God. In the chapter before us he shews the indispensable necessity of holiness, and the extreme danger of imagining ourselves in a state of acceptance with God, whilst destitute of his image on our souls: he shews this, as from other topics[r], so especially from this, that the indulgence of any sin counteracts the very end for which Christ came into the

[r] ver. 3—10.

the world; since "he was manifested on purpose to destroy the works of the devil."

Let us inquire,

I. What are those works which Christ came to destroy—

Satan, envious of the happiness of man in Paradise, endeavoured to bring him to the same state of guilt and misery to which he himself was reduced. How successful he was, it is needless now to mention: we all without exception experience in ourselves the sad effects of Adam's fall. Two things in particular that wicked fiend has introduced:

1. Sin—

[This was unknown to man, till Satan invaded the peaceful regions of Paradise, and prevailed on Eve to eat of the forbidden tree. He questioned the prohibition itself, or at least the equity of it; and then, denying that any evil consequences would ensue, he urged the vast advantages that would be derived from transgressing the Divine injunction; and thus "beguiled Eve by his subtlety." From that time he has practised upon others in a similar way, "blinding their eyes[b]," and putting all manner of wickedness into their hearts[c]. It is at his instigation that all the children of disobedience execute their wicked purposes[d]: he, as their father, teaches them, and, constrains them, as it were, to fulfil his will.

Even the godly he tempts, and labours to deceive by innumerable "wiles," and most subtle "devices[e]:" and, "if it were possible, he would deceive the very elect."]

2. Death—

[This also he introduced; for by sin came death, as its proper "wages," and its necessary consequence. Satan had assured our first parents that "they should not die:" but in this he shewed himself "the father of lies:" and by it he became "a murderer from the beginning[f]." The very instant they obeyed his voice, they died: temporal, spiritual, eternal death became their portion, and the portion of the whole human race[g]: nor would any child of man have ever seen the face of God in peace, if the Lord Jesus Christ had not interposed to "destroy this work of the devil." As to the great mass of mankind, they are experiencing all the bitter effects of

[b] 2 Cor. iv. 4.
[c] Eph. ii. 2. & vi. 11, 12.
[d] John viii. 41, 44.
[e] Luke xxii. 3. Acts v. 3.
[f] 1 Thess. iii. 5. 2 Cor. xi. 3.
[g] Rom. v. 12, 15—19.

of that first transgression: inheriting a corrupt nature, they follow the bent of their own inclinations, and rush on blindfold to everlasting perdition[h]. "The devil has taken them in his snare, and leads them captive at his will[i]." Hence he is called Apollyon, and Abaddon[k], as being the great and universal *destroyer*.

Nor does he relinquish his endeavours to destroy even the best of men: "he goes about, as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour:" there are not any so holy, but he shoots his "fiery darts" at them, and torments them with cruel buffetings[l], and "desires to have them, that he may sift them as wheat:" and, were he permitted, he would soon reduce even the soundest of men to chaff.]

Let us next inquire,

II. How he destroys them—

He came into the world, and "was manifested" in human flesh on purpose to destroy them: and he effects their destruction,

1. By the virtue of his sacrifice—

[The death of Christ was a true and proper atonement for sin; it was "a propitiation for the sins of the whole world:" and by it "he finished transgression, made an end of sin, and brought in everlasting righteousness[m]." Nor has he merely cancelled our debt, or removed our obligation to punishment, but has "abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light." "On the cross he triumphed over all the principalities and powers of hell[n];" and, "by death, overcame him that had the power of death, and delivered them, who, through fear of death, were all their life-time subject to bondage[o]." Yes, when our final victory over sin and death shall be celebrated in heaven, to *this* shall we ascribe it altogether; "Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood[p]."]

2. By the operation of his grace—

["Dead as we are in trespasses and sins, we are quickened by Christ[q];" and immediately begin in his strength to conflict with sin and Satan. The warfare we maintain is attended with many difficulties; so that we are sometimes ready to cry out, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from this body of sin and death?" but in our lowest state it is our privilege to add, "I thank God through Jesus Christ

[h] Eccl. ix. 3. [i] 2 Tim. ii. 26. [k] Rev. ix. 11.
[l] Eph. vi. 16. 2 Cor. xii. 7. [m] Dan. ix. 24. with ver. 5.
[n] Col. ii. 15. [o] Heb. ii. 14. [p] Rev. v. 9.
[q] Eph. ii. 1.

Christ our Lord[r]." "In him we are strong;" and through his gracious communications "we can do all things:" "none can be effectually against us, whilst he is for us." Having infused into our souls a principle of life, "he dwells in us," and "is himself our life[s]," and carries us forward "from conquering to conquer," till sin and "Satan are bruised under our feet," and "death itself is swallowed up in everlasting victory."]

OBSERVATIONS—

1. How infatuated are they who live in wilful sin!

[Do they consider whom they serve, and against whom they fight? Do they consider that they are doing those very works which proceed from and characterize the devil, and which Christ was manifested to destroy? Reflect on your conduct, Brethren, in this view, and then judge, whether ye do well to continue in it———]

2. What reason for humility have even the best of men!

[There is no man who has not daily occasion to lament his short-comings and defects. We are not any of us so watchful, but Satan finds some opportunities to deceive us; nor so expert in our warfare, but he wounds us occasionally by "his fiery darts." And when that wicked fiend has "got an advantage over us," with what exultation is he filled, even though he knows that he can never ultimately prevail against our blessed Lord! Be watchful, Brethren, that ye do not so gratify your malignant adversary, or so grieve the Spirit of your adorable Saviour. Put yourselves more habitually under the protection and guidance of your Divine Master; and "through him you shall be more than conquerors."]

3. How unbounded are the obligations we owe to Christ!

[Who but he could have ever redeemed us from sin and death? Who but he could have ever destroyed for us those works of the devil? Think what would have been the state of the world, if he had never become incarnate; what slaves we must have been if he had not liberated us; and what a death we must have undergone, if he had not died in our stead! Verily, if we felt our obligations as we ought, we should scarcely pass a moment without adverting to them, and magnifying him with songs of praise and thanksgiving. Let us dwell on the delightful thought, which, wherever it is entertained,

[r] Rom. vii. 24, 25. [s] Col. iii. 4.

entertained, creates a heaven upon earth: and in a little time our deliverance shall be complete; and we shall unite with all the hosts of heaven "in singing Hallelujah to God and to the Lamb for ever and ever."]

MCLXXXVI.

THE LOVE OF CHRIST A PATTERN FOR US, TO EACH OTHER.

1 John iii. 16. *Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.*

IN contemplating Christianity as a system, we scarcely know whether to admire more, the depth of its mysteries, or the height of its requirements. Of all mysteries, that specified in our text, the death of our incarnate God for the sins of men, is, beyond all comparison, the greatest: and, of all requirements, there is not one so arduous as that, which also is here inculcated, of laying down our lives for the brethren. The two taken together present Christianity in a most endearing view; and exhibit it as alike conducive to the perfection of our nature and the completion of our bliss. Let us notice,

I. The extent in which God has manifested his love to us—

If we survey the works of *Creation*, we shall see love inscribed upon them all. There was not one which the Creator himself did not pronounce to be "very good:" and, if there be any thing within the whole compass of it that is noxious to man, it was not so according to its original constitution, but has been rendered so by sin. If we mark also the dispensations of *Providence*, we shall find in all of them too the same blessed character of love: for the very anger of God is only an exercise of paternal love; and his judgments, an effort to bring his offending creatures into a state of reconciliation and acceptance with him. But it is in *Redemption* that his love

is

is chiefly displayed: for, in order to effect it, Jesus Christ assumed our nature, and actually "laid down his life for us."

In order that we may behold somewhat of the love displayed in this stupendous act, let us consider,

1. What our situation was that rendered such an effort necessary—

[We were fallen, after the example of "the angels that kept not their first estate;" and with them we must have taken our portion to all eternity. To deliver ourselves was absolutely impossible: nor could the whole creation afford us any effectual aid. The judgments denounced against sin must be executed, either on the sinner himself, or on one capable of standing in his place, and of satisfying all the demands of law and justice. But where could such an one be found? The first archangel was unequal to the task. None but God himself could interpose with effect, even that God, whose law we had violated and whose Majesty we had offended. Such was our helpless and hopeless state, when Almighty God determined to rescue us from our misery, by sending his only dear Son into the world to offer up himself a sacrifice for sin, and, by dying in our stead, to redeem us from all the penal consequences of our transgression.]

2. What by that effort is accomplished for us—

[Our guilt is expiated——And God is reconciled unto his offending creatures——We may now go to him in the name of his dear Son. We may plead the merit of his obedience unto death. The vilest sinner in the universe has no occasion to despair. All that is necessary for his acceptance with God has been done; and he needs only to "lay hold on the hope set before him," and to embrace the salvation that is freely offered him. If only we believe in Jesus, justice itself is become our friend and our advocate: because its utmost demands having been satisfied in Christ's obedience unto death, it claims, on behalf of all who believe in Jesus, the transfer of those rights to which, through the intervention of our Surety, we are entitled———]

3. What wonders of love are contained in it—

[To what, but love, can we trace this merciful interposition of the Deity in our behalf? was there any thing in us to *merit* it at God's hands? We, alas! were in the very state of the fallen angels, "ungodly," "sinners," "enemies," filled with all evil, and destitute even of a good desire. But, if God could find no inducement from any thing that was in us to exercise this mercy towards us, was there none

to

to be found within his own bosom? No, not any. He would have been equally happy and equally glorious, if neither men nor angels had ever existed: and, if neither his happiness nor his glory have been at all affected by the ruin of the one, neither would it have been by the ruin of the other, if we, like them, had been left to perish to all eternity. To his sovereign love and grace alone can we trace this stupendous act of mercy: and to that it is uniformly traced in the holy Scriptures: "God so *loved* the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son[a]:" "Herein is *love;* not that we loved God; but that *he loved us,* and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins[b]:" "God *commendeth his love* towards us, in that, when we were yet sinners, Christ died for us[c]." To all eternity will this be the one subject of wonder, and adoration, and thanksgiving to all the hosts of the redeemed; "To Him that *loved us,* and washed us from our sins in his own blood, be glory and dominion for ever and ever[d]."]

Our meditations on this subject will be the best preparation for considering,

II. The extent in which we should exercise love to our brethren—

To imitate our blessed Lord and Saviour, as far as possible, is our bounden duty: and especially are we commanded to do so in the exercise of *love.* Again and again does he require us to "love each other *as he loved us*[e]:" and the duty is enforced from the very same consideration as is proposed to us in the text[f].

Consider then our duty,

1. Towards "our brethren" of mankind at large—

[There is not a human being towards whom we do not owe a debt of love: and were it in our power, there is not a pain which we should not alleviate, nor a want which we should not supply. This is particularly noticed in the words following our text: "Whoso hath this world's goods, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?"

But if this be our duty towards them in reference to their *temporal* wants, how much more is it in reference to *the concerns of their souls!* How should we weep over the unhappy state of the Heathen world, immersed as they are in darkness,

[a] John i. 16. [b] 1 John iv. 9, 10. [c] Rom. v. 8.
[d] Rev. i. 5, 6. [e] John xiii. 34. & xv. 12. [f] 1 John iv. 11.

ness, and subjected to the entire dominion of the god of this world! What efforts should we not make for the enlightening of their minds, and for the discovering to them that love, that stupendous love, wherewith our God has loved both us and them! Say, Brethren, do ye not blush when you look back upon your conduct in this respect, and see what contracted views you have had of your duty towards them, and how little you have endeavoured to discharge your duty, even as far as it has been seen and acknowledged by you? Consider more especially your duty towards your Jewish Brethren, from whom you have received all the light which you yourselves enjoy: should it be no grief to you to see that highly-favoured people so blinded by prejudice, that, with the Scriptures in their hands, they contemn, and even execrate, that very Saviour who has shewn such love to them? Why do we not feel for them? why do we not exert ourselves in their behalf? why do we not endeavour to repay to them the debt of love which we have received from their forefathers? The Apostles, and multitudes of their descendants in the Ministry, laid down their lives for us, accounting themselves richly recompensed if they might but lead us to the knowledge of the true God, and of Jesus Christ whom he has sent. O that there were in us a corresponding sense of our duty, and that we could, with one heart and one mind, rise to the performance of it!]

2. Towards our Brethren of the Church in particular—

[There is an especial duty towards those who are united to the Church of Christ: "We are to do good unto all men, but especially unto them that are of the household of faith." We owe to them a pre-eminent degree of love, *because they are so near to us*, and *because they are so dear to God*, and more especially *because there is such an identity of interest between Christ and them*. They are our Brethren in a higher sense than others, being children of the same heavenly Father, and heirs of the same glorious inheritance. From all eternity have they been objects of God's electing love; and now, the monuments of his grace, the very temples in which he deigns to dwell. Every one of them is a member of Christ's mystical body, yea, "one spirit with him:" so that whatever we do for them, we do for Christ himself, as much as if he were personally present with us, and the visible object of our attentions. What love then do we not owe to *these*? I hesitate not to say, that our very life should be of small estimation with us in comparison of their welfare; and that martyrdom itself, if endured for the benefit of their souls, ought not to be

an object of dread, so much as of desire and joyful self-congratulation. We see this love in Aquila and Priscilla[g], and in Epaphroditus also[h]; but more especially in the apostle Paul, who was contented to be "in deaths oft" for the benefit of the Church, and who, in the near expectation of martyrdom, could say, "If I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy and rejoice with you all[i]."]

For the further IMPROVEMENT of the subject,

1. Let us contemplate our obligations—

[The love of God, which ought to be ever uppermost in our minds, alas! how light an impression does it make upon us! Even the mystery of the incarnation of God's only dear Son, and of "his laying down his life for us," is heard without any emotion, and regarded with little more concern, than if it were only "a cunningly-devised fable." What shall I say then, Brethren? Must there not be something essentially wrong, where such insensibility exists? are we not ashamed? are we not confounded, when we consider the state of our souls in this respect? Let us rise to a sense of our duty. Let us view our obligations to Almighty God: let us dwell upon them night and day: and let us never rest till our whole souls go forth in love to him, who has loved us, and given himself for us.]

2. Let us address ourselves to our duties—

[Methinks, the duty of love should be no burthen to us: it is in itself most delightful; and brings always its own reward along with it. Let us then exercise it in all its branches. Let every disposition contrary to love be mortified and subdued: all envy, hatred, malice, wrath, uncharitableness, let it all be banished from our hearts; and let the love which hopeth all things, believeth all things, endureth all things, be the one reigning principle in our souls.

Let this principle too be brought into activity for the benefit of all mankind. Our time, our talents, our property, our very life, let it all be consecrated to the Lord for the glory of his name, and for the welfare of his Church and people. Let us not be indulging vain excuses, and saying, 'This will require sacrifices, which I am unwilling to make: *that* will require abilities, which I do not possess.' What sacrifice is there beyond that of life? Even *that* it is our duty to make for the world and for the Church; and therefore every subordinate sacrifice should be of no account. And as for talents and abilities, if only we will use those which we have, God will glorify himself by them, and render them subser-

[g] Rom. xvi. 4. [h] Phil. ii. 30. [i] ib. ver. 16, 17.

subservient to the welfare of mankind, if only we will endeavour to improve them with diligence, and to exercise them with fidelity.

You see what God would have us both to *be* and *do*: he would have us overwhelmed with a sense of his love to us, and abounding in the most self-denying exercises of love to all mankind. Come, Brethren, gird yourselves to the occasion. Your God and Saviour demands it at your hands. The whole universe also joins in one common cry, "Come over to us, and help us." And he who most abounds in offices of love to others, shall receive the richest recompence into his own bosom from that God whose name and nature is "Love."]

MCLXXXVIII.

THE LOVE OF GOD IN GIVING HIS SON FOR US.

1 John iv. 9, 10. *In this was manifested the love of God towards us, because that God sent his only-begotten Son into the world that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.*

OF all the endearing characters that are given us of God, that by which he is designated in the words immediately preceding our text, is the most comprehensive and most glorious; "God is love." It might seem indeed that this appellation but ill-suited with the sterner attribute of justice: but in the execution of his wrath against impenitent transgressors, his love to the whole creation appears, no less than in his dispensations of grace and mercy to the penitent: even as the love of a Judge towards the whole community appears in condemning a murderer, as much as in protecting the weak, or acquitting the innocent. There is however one exercise of his love which infinitely exceeds all others; and that is, the gift of his only-begotten Son to die for us. This is the subject set before us in the text, and which the return of this day* calls more especially to our remembrance.

Let us consider,

I. The love of God as it is here exhibited—

Instead

* Christmas-day.

Instead of entering at large into the subject of our Saviour's incarnation, we shall confine ourselves strictly to the consideration of the Father's love in the different steps of it, as mentioned in the text. How astonishing is it,

1. That he should desire the restoration of our souls to life!

[Why should he ever entertain such a thought as this? Could we profit him at all? or would he suffer any loss by leaving us to perish? If he chose to have human beings to behold and participate his glory, could he not in an instant call forth millions into existence, and communicate to them the blessings we had forfeited? Had he determined that we should never fall, and that he would impose on us a necessity to continue in our primæval state, we should have the less wondered at his love: but that he should foresee our fall, and yet determine to restore us; that he should behold us actually fallen, and yet pity us; that, when our first parents fled from him, he should follow them with invitations to accept of mercy; and that, when they shifted off all blame from themselves, and cast it eventually even upon God himself, he should still retain his desire to save them; how amazing was this love! Had he proposed only to remit their punishment, and to blot out their existence, this had been a wonderful act of love: but to desire the restoration of such creatures to his favour, that they might live with him in glory for evermore, is truly such an exhibition of love, as far surpasses the utmost stretch of our conceptions. How differently did he act towards the angels, when they fell! He never entertained a thought of restoring *them*[a]: but, when *man* fell, then, as if he himself could not be happy without us, he concerted with his eternal Son to deliver us, and to save us with an everlasting salvation[b].]

2. That he should send his only-begotten Son into the world to effect this!

[What ways of accomplishing this object God *might* have found, it is not for us to say: but it is reasonable to believe, that nothing less than the incarnation of his only-begotten Son could effect it. And how wonderful it was, that he should ever adopt such a measure as that! that he should spare his only dear Son from his bosom, and send him into a world that was already cursed by sin! that he should send him to assume our very nature; to be "made in the likeness of sinful flesh;" yea, to be made in all points like as we are, sin only excepted! However he might desire our recovery,

[a] Heb. ii. 16. [b] Zech. vi. 13.

recovery, it seems absolutely incredible that he should ever condescend to use such means to effect it: yet we are told that he actually did so; and that he sent, not an angel, not all the hosts of angels, but even "his only-begotten Son, into the world, that we might live through him[bb]."]

3. That he should send Him to be a propitiation for our sins!

[For the honour of God's moral government, it was necessary that his hatred against sin should be made manifest, and that, if mercy were exercised towards fallen man, it should be only in a way that would consist with the rights of justice, and preserve the honour of God's broken law. This could only be done by a vicarious sacrifice, a sacrifice of equal value with the souls of all mankind. Such a sacrifice could be made by none but our incarnate God; who therefore assumed our nature, that he might expiate sin by the sacrifice of himself, and make himself "a propitiation for the sins of the whole world." What love then was here; that God should send his only-begotten Son into the world for such an end as this! Had he sent him to instruct us by his doctrine and example, it had been a stupendous act of love: but to send him on purpose that he might bear our sins in his own body on "the tree," and die in our stead, "the just for the unjust, to bring us to God;" this is a love that is utterly incomprehensible: it has heights and depths that can never be explored.]

To confirm this view of our subject, we need only call your attention to that assertion of St. Paul, that "in this God *commendeth* his love to us;" and to that pious reflection of his, "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things[c]?" These passages abundantly prove, that, as the gift of Christ to us was the fruit of the Father's love, so it was an instance of his love, that infinitely outweighs all else that he ever has done, or ever can do, for sinful man.

Let us now consider,

II. Our love to God as put in competition with it—

It is evidently supposed in our text that some might be blind and impious enough to ascribe their salvation rather to the love which they bore to God, than

[bb] John iii. 16. [c] Rom. v. 8. & viii. 32.

than to that which, of his own free and sovereign grace, he bore to them. Hence the Apostle says, "Herein is love, *not that we loved God*, but that he loved us." It is indeed surprising that any Child of man should ever entertain such an idea of this which the Apostle explodes: but experience proves, that there is no merit so great, but man will arrogate it to himself; and no tribute so just, but he will refuse it to his God. We proceed then to notice this sentiment in a two-fold view:

1. The erroneousness of it—

[Let us for a moment inquire, What is the state of fallen man? Has he *of himself* any love to God? So far from it, we are told, that "the carnal mind is *enmity against* God; and that it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be[d]." There is not any one thing relating to God, which the natural man loves: not his perfections; not his word; not his ordinances; not his people; not his ways: he is in his heart adverse to them all. But it may be said, that many are brought to love God at last. True: but how is this effected? by any power in man? or by any previous good inclination in man? No: "It is God that gives us both to will and to do, of his own good pleasure[e]:" it is "he, and he alone, that makes us to differ," either from others, or from our former selves: we neither have any thing, nor can have any thing, but what we receive from him[f]. How then can that which we receive from God be the *cause* or *ground* of his conferring it upon us?

The text, it is true, speaks of God's sending his Son into the world to die for us: and it may be thought, that no one would ascribe that gift to any merit of his own. We grant it: but, if men do not ascribe to their own merits the gift of a Saviour, they ascribe to their own merits the gift of *salvation* itself: yea, exceeding vehemently do they arrogate to themselves this honour: and when they are constrained to acknowledge, that in their unregenerate state they have done no good works to deserve salvation, they will maintain, that God has respect to some good which he *foresees* in them, and makes some natural or acquired excellence in them the *reason* and the *measure* of his favour towards them. But we scarcely conceive any expressions more strong than those by which God cautions his people against this vain conceit. Hear what he said respecting it to his chosen people the Jews[g]——— Hear

[d] Rom. viii. 7. [e] Phil. ii. 13. [f] 1 Cor. iv. 7.
[g] Deut. vii. 7, 8. & ix. 4—6. & Ezek. xxxvi. 22, 32.

Hear also what Jesus said to his own immediate Disciples, who had certainly as good ground for boasting as any of us can have[h]——— Hear further what St. John says in a few verses after our text, and which is applicable, not to one age or people, but to the saints of God in every age; "We love him, *because he first loved us*[i]." But indeed it is the voice of Scripture from one end to the other[k], that "God has mercy on whom he will have mercy[l]," and that "there is a remnant according to the election of grace[m]." To be-making this truth a constant subject of our Ministrations, as some do, is highly injudicious; but, when it comes fairly in our way, we must maintain it, as necessary for the abasing of man's pride, and for the exalting of God's honour and glory.]

2. The impiety of it—

[God is a jealous God: his very "name is Jealous[n]," and "his glory he will not give to another[o]. Now the great end for which he has redeemed man, was the advancement of his own glory. St. Paul, in the space of a few verses, repeats this almost to satiety, if we may so speak[p]———But to ascribe the gift of a Saviour, or of salvation, either in whole or in part, to *our love to him*, is to rob him of his glory; and to establish a ground for glorying in ourselves, when he has declared, "that no flesh shall glory in his presence[q]." Now, in reference to ourselves, we are backward to acknowledge that there is any great sin in this. Let us then transfer our thoughts to the fallen angels, and contemplate *them* as acting in this manner. They have sinned, as we have: and are incapable of restoring themselves to the Divine favour, as we are: Let us then suppose God to say, 'I will send my only-begotten Son into those regions of misery, to bear their punishment, and to expiate their guilt: and I will send my Holy Spirit into their hearts, to change their natures, to renew them after my image, and to fit them for my presence.' Suppose, when God, of his own Sovereign grace and mercy had done this, those wicked fiends should arrogate the glory to themselves, and say, 'God has saved us, because he foresaw what holy dispositions we should exercise, and how richly we should merit his favour;' What should we think of them? Should we not say, that their guilt was augmented ten-fold; and that the punishment they might expect would be proportionably severe? Where then is the difference between them and us? What have we, more than they, to merit the Divine favour? Or

[h] John xv. 16.
[i] ver. 19.
[k] Jer. xxxi. 3. Eph. ii. 8, 9. 2 Tim. i. 9.
[l] Rom. ix. 11, 15, 16.
[m] Rom. xi. 5.
[n] Exod. xxxiv. 14.
[o] Isai. xlii. 8.
[p] Eph. i. 5, 6, 7. 9, 11, 12, 14. & iii. 10, 11.
[q] 1 Cor. i. 27—29.

Or what can we have more than they, except it be given us from above? Know then, that, if God would burn with indignation against *them* for such pride and ingratitude, so will he against *us*, if we refuse to give him the glory due to his name. If Herod was made a monument of wrath for accepting from others a tribute due only to his God, much more shall we, if we, reversing what he has spoken, shall presume to say, "Herein is love, *not that God* loved *us*, *but that we* loved *him*, and earned by our love an interest in his favour."]

We conclude with some suitable ADVICE:

1. Contemplate frequently this love of God to you—

[The angels are not interested in the wonders of redemption as we are, and yet are ever "desiring them to look into them." Shall we then be regardless of them? Shall we not search into them; and meditate upon them; and speak of them; and glory in them; and make them "all our salvation, and all our desire?" Shall we not especially consecrate to the contemplation of them this season which has been set apart by our Church for that express purpose? O make not this a time for carnal feasting, but for holy meditation, and for delight in God!]

2. Get your hearts filled with love to him—

[If our love be not the *cause*, it nevertheless should be the *consequence* of his love to us. Of this, none can entertain a doubt. Who that is in the smallest degree impressed with the Saviour's love to us, does not see the reasonableness of that awful denunciation, "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maran-atha[r]?" Yes, on whomsoever that curse may fall, we must all acknowledge the justice of it; and in the day of judgment, when it shall be yet more awfully denounced on the enemies of Christ, there will not be a saint or angel in the universe who will not add his *Amen* to it. O let us now muse on his love to us, till the fire of Divine love kindle in our hearts, and we speak with our tongues the high praises of our God!]

3. Seek to abound in love to each other—

[This is the improvement which the Apostle suggests in the words following our text[s]. In the love of Christ to us is both the *reason*, and the *model*, for our love to each other. Was his love to us unmerited? we also should freely exercise love even to the evil and unthankful. Did his love lead him to forego the glory and felicity of heaven, and to submit to the accursed death of the cross for us? such should be our love to our fellow-creatures: there should be no measure of labour or

[r] 1 Cor. xvi. 22. [s] ver. 11.

or self-denial which we should not willingly exercise for the good of others; yea, even to the laying down of our life for them[t]. Here then we see *the proper duty of this season:* Search out the poor, the sick, and the afflicted, that you may administer to them the consolations they stand in need of: and especially exert yourselves to see what you can do for *the souls of men* — — — This is the work that will most assimilate you to Christ, and will best prove the sincerity of your love to him.]

[t] Ch. iii. 16.

MCLXXXIX.

CHRIST THE SAVIOUR OF THE WORLD.

1 John iv. 14. *We have seen, and do testify, that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world.*

WERE it announced to us that the enemies of our country were vanquished, that those who had menaced us with utter destruction were all taken captive, and that we might henceforth enjoy an honourable and lasting peace; our first inquiry would be, What ground is there for crediting the report? If we were assured, that several persons, who had been present at the battle and had seen the captive enemies, were sent by the conqueror on purpose to make known to us the glad tidings, we should be filled with transports of joy, and congratulate one another on the glorious event. Such tidings, and thus authenticated, we have to declare unto you; not indeed in reference to an earthly enemy, but in reference to our great adversary, the Devil; whom Christ, our Almighty Deliverer, has subdued. The Apostles were sent by their victorious Lord to proclaim the news; and they have come to us, affirming that they were eye-witnesses of the truths which they have been commissioned to declare.

But that we may ascertain more the nature and growth of their testimony, we shall shew,

I. What evidence we have for the fact reported in the text—

It would divert us too far from our subject to enter into

into the question of the credibility of the Apostles; suffice it to say, that, as they had no possible inducement to deceive us, so they have never, on any occasion, betrayed the smallest wish to deceive us. Their veracity is unimpeached, and may fully be relied on.

But, it may be asked, Were they themselves well-informed on the points whereof they affirm? We answer, They *saw* the things which they attest: they did not receive them from the report of others, but were assured of them by ocular demonstration. They saw all which they affirm concerning Christ: they saw,

1. His personal glory—

[Others, even his bitterest enemies, beheld him as *a man* like unto themselves; but some of his Apostles had ocular proofs of *his Godhead:* they saw him transfigured on Mount Tabor, his face shining brighter than the meridian sun, and his garments all illumined by the bright effulgence of his Deity; and they heard the Father's voice from heaven attesting him to be his only, his beloved Son[a]. This vision was vouchsafed to them for their more perfect satisfaction: and they record the circumstance in proof, that what they reported concerning him they *knew* to be true[b].]

2. His matchless perfections—

[Not they only, but his very enemies, were astonished at his *wisdom*, and constrained to confess, that "never man spake like him." His *power* and *goodness* were alike manifest in the authority which he exercised over diseases, devils, and the very elements. Hence, on different occasions, his Disciples expressed their full conviction that he was the promised Messiah, the Saviour of the world: "We believe and are sure that thou art that Christ the Son of the living God[c]."]

3. His shameful death—

[His crucifixion was seen by all: but there were some circumstances attending his death, which tended to corroborate the opinion which his Disciples had formed of him. The effusion of blood and water from his wounded side in two distinct streams, particularly impressed them with the idea, that he died to cleanse men, not only from the guilt, but also from the power

[a] Matt. xvii. 2. Mark ix. 2, 7. [b] John. i. 14. 2 Pet. i. 16—18.
[c] Matt. xvi. 16. John vi. 69.

power and pollution, of sin[d]. And the prodigies attending his dissolution were such, that the Centurion who attended the crucifixion exclaimed, Truly this was a righteous man, this was the Son of God[e].]

4. His triumphant resurrection—

[At the precise moment of his resurrection, none were present except the soldiers who were placed to guard his tomb: but within a few hours he was seen by several of his Disciples: and for the space of forty days he appeared to them on a great variety of occasions[f]. By these manifestations of himself, the incredulity of the Apostles was overcome[g]: and much stress was laid upon them by the Apostles in confirmation of their word[h].]

5. His glorious ascension—

[Many were permitted to behold this glorious event: and this, together with the descent of the Holy Spirit whom Christ had promised to send down, convinced the Disciples, beyond a possibility of doubt, that Jesus was the Christ. From this time, (the time of the Spirit's descent,) the Apostles began to preach Christ as the Saviour of the world: and they constantly founded their testimony upon the fact of their having been eye-witnesses of every thing that they declared[i]. Indeed, such stress did they lay on this circumstance, that, in choosing a successor to Judas in the Apostleship, they took care to have one who was on a par with themselves in this particular[k]: and, in speaking of Christ, they dwell on this circumstance with most triumphant satisfaction[l]. It was for the purpose of qualifying Saul to bear the same convincing testimony, that the Lord Jesus appeared personally to him in the way to Damascus[m]: and, when *his* Ministry was undervalued on account of his supposed inferiority in these respects, he triumphantly appealed to his opposers, "Am I not an Apostle? Have I not *seen* Jesus Christ our Lord[n]?"

If then such a number of faithful witnesses, all concurring in the same testimony, and all qualified to give their testimony from a personal inspection of the things attested, can establish any truth whatever, we must confess that the fact asserted in the text is established beyond the possibility of doubt.]

The fact being proved, we proceed to shew,

II. For

[d] John xix. 34—37. with 1 John v. 6.
[e] Matt. xxvii. 54. Mar. xv 39. Luke xxiii. 47.
[f] Acts i. 3. [g] John xx. 24—28.
[h] 1 Cor. xv. 3—8. Acts x. 40, 41. [i] Acts ii. 32, 33, 36.
[k] Acts i. 21, 22. [l] 1 John i. 1—3. [m] Acts xxvi. 16.
[n] 1 Cor. ix. 1.

II. For what end we bear testimony respecting it—

To set forth Christ as the Saviour of the world was the one labour of all the Apostles. The same also is our employment: and we make that our constant theme, or, at least, the sum and substance of our discourses:

1. That you may have just views of the Father's love—

[We behold the goodness of our God in every thing around us: but not all the creation can exhibit it in so bright a view as the cross of Christ: *there*, even in the face of a crucified Jesus, shines all the glory of our God. Love, in particular, is there portrayed in its most endearing colours. The gift of God's only dear Son to die for man, was the most stupendous effort of love that ever was, or can be, exhibited[o] ——— It is greater love than was ever shewn even to the angels themselves[p], and, while it brings us nearer to the throne of God than they[q], it will furnish us with everlasting songs in which they can never join[r] ———]

2. That you may renounce all erroneous methods of seeking acceptance with him—

[If this glorious truth had never been revealed, we might well have made the same inquiries as Balak[s]. But what room is there for such inquiries now? Do we despise this unspeakable gift of God? or do we hope that we shall be able to establish a firmer foundation for our hope, than that which is laid in the blood and righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ? ——— O reject not the proffered mercy of your God! Say not, 'The Saviour of the world shall not save me.' *This* is what you do, in fact, say, when you go about to "establish any righteousness of your own[t]". To guard you against so fatal an error, St. Paul testified with all the energy he could express[u]: and *we* also testify, that there is no other foundation to be laid[x], nor any other name to be trusted in[y], but that of Jesus Christ.]

3. That you may embrace the Lord Jesus with whole hearts—

[View him as sent down from heaven, even from the bosom of the Father: view him as dying in your place and stead[z]: view him as saving a ruined world: Can you forbear to

[o] John iii. 16. Rom. v. 8. ver. 9, 10. [p] Heb. ii. 16.
[q] Rev. vii. 11. [r] Rev. v. 9, 10. [s] Mic. vi. 6, 7.
[t] Rom. x. 3. [u] Gal. v. 2—4. [x] 1 Cor. iii. 11.
[y] Acts iv. 12. [z] Isai. liii. 4, 6. 1 Pet. iii. 18.

to love him? Can you refrain from seeking an interest in him? Are you not ready to cry out, "Hosanna to the Son of David; Hosanna in the highest?" Behold him, I say; admire him; adore him; trust in him; "cleave unto him with full purpose of heart;" "count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus your Lord." Alas! you are but too little affected with his love; and need to be reminded of it continually: "we determine therefore, with God's help, to know nothing among you but Christ and him crucified," and to set before you his love, till it constrains you to love him, and to live to him.]

CONCLUSION—

[Hear once more our testimony. We testify, that Christ is indeed the Son of God, even "Emmanuel, God with us." We testify, that the one errand on which he came, was to save a ruined world. We testify, that he has done all that was necessary for the salvation of our souls; and that "he is both able and willing to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him"——— O compel us not to complain, as he did, "We testify of that we have seen, and ye receive not our witness[a]!" but let us behold you inquiring after him, till ye can say with the Samaritan Converts, "we have seen ("heard") him ourselves, and believe that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world[b]." It is true, you cannot now see him, as the Apostles did, face to face; but by faith you may "see him that is invisible:" and if only you behold him now by faith, you shall one day see him, as you are seen, and "know him, as you are known."]

[a] John iii. 11. [b] John iv. 42.

MCXC.

THE DISTINCTIVE CHARACTER OF A CHRISTIAN.

1 John iv. 16. *We have known and believed the love that God hath to us.*

NEVER was there a truth so deep, so comprehensive, so endearing, conveyed in so short a space as that immediately following our text; "God is love." It is engraven on the face of universal nature: the heavenly bodies, in their various courses, proclaim it: the earth, with all its productions, declares it: the human race in particular, both in the frame

frame of their bodies and the faculties of their souls, unanimously attest it. Every work of God's providence displays it; and every word of his grace. Even the judgments which he threatens, and those which he executes, must be traced to love as their source; for though, as it respects the individuals that suffer, whether men or devils, he shews only his displeasure; yet, as justice executed on criminals is mercy to the community, so is the punitive justice of the Deity an act of love to the whole intelligent creation.

But glorious as this truth is, it is but little known: the revelation which was designed to illustrate and confirm it, is lightly regarded: and those things which incessantly engage the admiration of angels, are scarcely considered by men as worthy of the slightest attention.

Some there are however who know how to appreciate this truth. Whilst it is overlooked by the wise of this world, it is known, believed, and loved, by every true Christian, whatever be his condition or attainments in all other respects: if he be low and illiterate, he yet has a just apprehension of it in his mind; and if he be great and learned, he values this above all his other knowledge.

From the words before us we shall be led to shew,

I. The distinctive character of the Christian—

The love referred to in the text, is that which God manifested in the gift of his dear Son to die for us—

[In the context, the Apostle particularly directs our attention to this point[a]. He elsewhere declares, that the Father's love to our ruined race was the motive that induced him (if we may so speak) to send his Son into the world[b]: and another Apostle refers to that event as the brightest exhibition which God himself could give of his love to man[c]. Great as many of his bounties are, this infinitely excels them all.———]

The true Christian knows and believes this love—

[Others may talk of it with accuracy according to the statement

[a] ver. 9, 10. [b] John iii. 16. [c] Rom. v. 8.

statement given of it in the Scriptures; but it is the Christian alone that justly apprehends it. The light of others, like that of the moon, is inoperative, uninfluential: but the Christian's light is like that of the sun: it diffuses a genial warmth through the soul, and causes every grace to flourish and abound. Were it sufficient to say, "I believe," all who repeat the Creed would be believers; and there would be no room for that question of our Lord, "When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith upon the earth?" But to exercise a living faith is a very distinct thing: this is peculiar to the true Christian: he knows and believes the love which God has exercised towards us: he "believes it" as the foundation of all his hopes——— he "knows it" as the source of all his joys———]

But that we may not deceive ourselves, we proceed to shew,

II. How we may know whether that character be formed in us—

If a man know and believe that any thing of a very interesting nature, whether good or evil, has befallen him, he cannot fail of being, in some measure at least, suitably affected with it. Now, if we have known and believed the love that God hath to us, we must of necessity have been filled,

1. With wonder and admiration—

[This subject has excited universal wonder through all the hosts of heaven: how then can it fail to astonish us, if we truly know it and believe it? Did the apostle John express such wonder at our adoption into God's family, as to say, "Behold, what manner of love is this wherewith the Father hath loved us!" Was St. Paul so overwhelmed with astonishment at the idea of the Gentiles being admitted into the Church as to exclaim, "O the depths!" and shall not we be amazed at a miracle of mercy that is infinitely more stupendous, that has a depth and length and breadth and height that surpass the conception of men or angels? What are all other gifts in comparison of the gift of his only dear Son. "Having not spared *him*, but delivered *him* up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" Know then, that, if ye have never been lost in wonder at this "unspeakable gift," and at the unsearchable riches of grace and love contained in it; yea, if this be not in a measure your daily experience, you have never yet attained the Christian character: whatever you may have professed, or however you may have lived, you have yet to learn the first great lesson in the School of Christ.]

2. With love and gratitude—

[Men in general speak of the great mystery of Redemption as a common thing; and will repeat the Creed, or the truths contained in it, with as much indifference, as if the Gospel were nothing but "a cunningly-devised fable." We might live with them for years, and never once hear them speak with rapture on this glorious theme. But "ye have not so learned Christ, if so be ye have heard him and been taught by him as the truth is in Jesus." "The love of Christ," if truly known and believed, will "have a constraining efficacy, to make us live to him who died for us." The moment we feel it aright, we shall inquire, How can I requite it acceptably? What shall I render to the Lord for all these wonders of love and mercy? Contracted as our views of this mystery may be, "we shall count all things but loss and dung for the excellency of the knowledge of it." It will be the one subject of our meditations, the one theme of our praise———]

3. With a desire to know our own personal interest in it—.

[The man that has no fears or jealousies about his interest in the love of God, has no just conception of it at all. He may descant learnedly on the Scriptures, but he knows nothing of the mystery contained in them. To be in suspense and doubt whether we are accepted in the Beloved, is to a true Christian more painful than the severest bodily suffering could be. On the other hand, to be able to say, "Christ hath loved *me* and given himself for *me*;" "My beloved is mine, and I am his;" *this* is a very heaven upon earth: and when the Christian can adopt this language, and feel "the love of God shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost," "his soul is indeed satisfied as with marrow and fatness:" he cares for nothing, and desires nothing: created objects lose all their lustre, when once he has thus beheld the Sun of Righteousness shining in his glory.]

ADDRESS,

1. Those who have not this evidence within them—

[There can be no difficulty in making the foregoing inquiries. But it is a fearful thing to find on examination that we have not the grace of God in us. O think not light of the distinction that has been pointed out! for it will form a ground of distinction in the day of judgment, and determine our abode either in heaven or in hell[d]. Remember, too, that you will in that day be wholly without excuse. Others

[d] 2 Thess. i. 7—10.

Others may say, "It was my misfortune rather than my fault that I did not know and believe the love of God in Christ Jesus; for I never had it faithfully declared unto me." But to *you* there has been no want of *instruction* to enlighten, no want of *evidence* to convince, you: so that your ignorance and unbelief involve you in the deepest guilt[e]. O continue not in such a state as this! but pray that "the Spirit of wisdom and revelation may be given to you, and that the eyes of your understanding may be enlightened[f]," that "you perish not for lack of knowledge."]

2. Those who can adopt the language of our text—

[If you can with truth declare that you have known and believed the love of God, then we must say to you, "Blessed are ye; for flesh and blood hath not revealed this unto you;" but "God hath shined into your hearts to give it unto you." Be thankful for this distinguishing mercy: and seek to "grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." St. Paul, after preaching the Gospel twenty years, "accounted not himself yet awhile to have attained," but still desired to "know Christ in the power of his resurrection, and in the fellowship of his sufferings." Do ye then press forward, and emulate the angels who are incessantly "desiring to look into these things." Make not the love of God a matter for speculation, but for admiration and praise. It is that which will be the subject of your songs in the eternal world; let it therefore now inflame your souls with gratitude, and animate you to unremitting diligence in the service of your God. Strive to exercise love to him, seeing that he has shewn such love to you.]

[e] Hos. iv. 6. 2 Cor. iv. 4. Heb. ii. 3. [f] Eph. i. 16—18.

MCXCI.

JUSTIFICATION AND SANCTIFICATION BY CHRIST.

1 John v. 6. *This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood: and it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth.*

THERE are in the Scriptures, and especially in the history of our blessed Lord, many circumstances recorded, which appear to have been accidental and of no moment, whilst they were in reality ordained of God, and of the utmost importance for the

advancement of his glory. For instance, the soldiers offering him vinegar upon the cross, and dividing some of our Lord's clothing, and casting lots for the remainder; what trifles do these circumstances appear, when compared with all the other events of that day! Yet by means of them were the most improbable prophecies fulfilled, and the strongest possible testimony given to the Messiahship of Jesus. Another circumstance I will mention as deserving of particular notice, namely, that of the soldier, without any order from his superiors, piercing our Lord with his spear after he was dead. This, as far as respected the soldier, was a mere wanton act either of cruelty or contempt; of cruelty, if he doubted whether he was not yet alive; and of contempt, if he believed him to be really dead. But that act of his, whilst it fulfilled a very remarkable prophecy, was productive of consequences which are replete with instruction to the whole world. On his inflicting the wound, there came forth from our Saviour's side both water and blood, not blended together, but in streams visibly distinct from each other. St. John, who was the only Disciple present, took particular notice of this. He saw it with his own eyes: and, in his Gospel, he records it as a most remarkable event, to which he could bear the most assured testimony, and of which he was extremely anxious that every one should be informed: "One of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side: and forthwith came thereout blood and water. *And he that saw it bare record: and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe*[a]." It is to this that the Apostle alludes in the words of our text: "This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood:" and the same anxiety does he manifest to impress it deeply on our minds, when he adds, "The Spirit beareth witness to it; and the Spirit is truth." Let me then, in conformity with his example, call your attention to,

I. The

[a] John xix. 34, 35.

I. The truth here specified—

In this event there was a deep stupendous mystery, inasmuch as it declared, in a very striking way, the great ends of our Saviour's death. Take the Apostle's assertion,

1. As simply declared—

[Our Lord "Jesus Christ came by water and blood." He came as "a Teacher sent from God," to instruct us in the knowledge of his will, to lead us also by his own example, and by the gift of his grace to strengthen us for the attainment of universal holiness. This is called "coming by water:" for, as water is of use to cleanse and purify, so his doctrine was to cleanse and purify our souls from every species of defilement.

But it was not merely as a Teacher that Jesus came, but to make an atonement also for sin. This he was to do by offering himself a sacrifice for us upon the cross: and this he did, shedding his own most precious blood, that through it we might be purged from guilt, and be reconciled to our offended God. In this he differed from all who had ever come before him. The different prophets that had been sent from God, came solely for the former purpose: and John the Baptist, who baptized such multitudes in the Wilderness, professed that the whole scope of his Ministry was to lead men to repentance. But Jesus had a higher end in view. Repentance however deep, and reformation however extensive, would have been of no avail, if an atonement had not been offered to God for the sins of men: and this office neither men nor angels could undertake: he alone was sufficient for it: his Divine nature would give a virtue and efficacy to his blood, which no other blood could have, and would render it a sufficient propitiation for the sins of the whole world. For that end therefore he assumed our nature, and died upon the cross; so that, as my text expresses it, "he came by blood."]

2. As solemnly confirmed—

[There is a peculiar emphasis to be observed in the Apostle's mode of repeating his assertion. The circumstance of the blood and water flowing in distinct streams from the wounded side of our Saviour, was intended emblematically to declare the united ends of his death. The Apostle therefore would not suffer it to be overlooked, lest by a partial view of Christ, as a Prophet only, we should lose the blessings which he came to purchase for us. The mode appointed by the law for the purifying of the leper, will place this matter in a just

just point of view. Two birds were taken: one of them was killed over living water, and his blood was mingled with the water. The blood and water were then sprinkled seven times upon the leper, and the living bird, being dipped in the blood and water, was let loose into the open field, and the leper was pronounced clean[b]. This was intended to shew how man should be cleansed from sin. The Lord Jesus Christ should shed his blood as an atonement for sin: he should also send forth his Spirit upon man: by neither of these separately should he fulfil the office of a Saviour; and by neither of these separately should man be restored to the favour of his God. The union of the two was necessary for all; and the two united should be effectual for all: so that, however deep any one's leprosy may have been, he shall, the very instant he has been so purified, be pronounced clean.

This then all must carefully notice, if they would possess the full benefits of Christ's salvation.]

In addition to his own testimony, the Apostle further confirms his assertion, by adducing,

II. The testimony which the Holy Spirit bears to it—

In two ways the Holy Spirit, "the Spirit of truth," has borne witness to the doctrine inculcated in our text:

1. By established ordinances in the Church of God—

[This doctrine was not unknown to the Church of Israel in the Wilderness; for there were ordinances appointed on purpose that it might be known, and be kept in everlasting remembrance. The Paschal Lamb which was slain from year to year reminded them, as indeed all the daily sacrifices did, that they were redeemed by blood. And, in their passage through the Red Sea, they were baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea, to shew them that they must also be washed from their pollutions by the Spirit of God; as indeed all the washings and lustrations appointed by the law yet further taught them. Under the Christian dispensation, the same truths are constantly inculcated by the two sacraments appointed for our observance. Our Baptismal washing reminds us, that "Christ came by water;" and the Sacramental cup, which is "emblematic of his blood which he shed for the remission of our sins," reminds us, that "he came by blood." And our Apostle himself, in the second verse after my text, declares, that *these ordinances were appointed for these very ends* by the Spirit of God, who *by* them, and *with* them, bears testimony

[b] Lev. xiv. 4—7.

timony to the truth asserted in our text: "There are three that bear record on earth; the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and *these three agree in one:*" they agree in attesting that the Lord Jesus "Christ came by water and blood; not by water only, but by water and blood."

How can we be sufficiently thankful for such clear and unquestionable testimonies to these important truths. Here is nothing left to arbitrary interpretations of a few select passages, which an advocate for some favourite doctrine might be supposed to pervert for the purpose of establishing his own sentiments: here are ordinances which speak for themselves, and which cannot be perverted: the Spiritual import of them cannot admit a doubt: so that we may consider the truth of our text as fully declared, and incontrovertibly established.]

2. By visible operations on the souls of men—

[The Holy Spirit has yet further attested this truth by his immediate agency on the soul. He came down in a visible shape, in cloven tongues, as of fire, upon the Disciples on the day of Pentecost, in order to qualify them to proclaim these truths in all manner of languages; and, in confirmation of their word, he converted not less than three thousand souls to God in one day, enlightening all their minds, renewing all their souls, and filling them all with the richest consolations. When Peter opened the Gospel to the Gentiles also in the house of Cornelius, the Holy Spirit again bore witness to the truth in the same manner. The manner in which this is noticed by the historian, is worthy of particular observation. St. Peter, in his discourse respecting Christ, said, "To him give all the Prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins." Then we are told, "*While Peter yet spake these words*, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word." Here you perceive, it was at the very moment when Peter was proclaiming Jesus *as a Saviour*, not as a Teacher, but as a Saviour, who was "come not by water only, but by water and blood," that the Holy Spirit descended visibly upon all to attest that blessed truth. So, in like manner, at the present day, the Holy Spirit bears witness to this truth in every place: he works by it to the conversion of men to God, to the enriching of them with peace and joy, to the transforming of them into the Divine image, and to the bringing of them safely to glory. No other doctrine is ever honoured by him for these ends; but this is invariably, wherever it is proclaimed with that fidelity which becomes a servant of Christ. The people, who receive this doctrine into their hearts, are themselves made living witnesses of its truth, being enabled by it to live as no other persons can live, and to shine as lights in a dark benighted

benighted world. In every age this doctrine has been, and to the end of the world it shall be, "preached with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven[c]."]

ADDRESS—

1. Be careful to receive these truths into your hearts—

[It cannot be that, when so much care has been taken to reveal them to us, we should be at liberty to neglect them: yet are they most grievously neglected by the great majority of the Christian world. The blood of Christ is actually denied by many as an atonement for sin: and of those who do not systematically deny its virtue, many are yet unmindful of it as a source of salvation to their own souls. And as for the influences of the Holy Spirit, they are derided by the generality as the dreams of a heated imagination. Ah! Brethren, let it not be thus with you. Trample not in this ungodly manner upon "the blood of the Covenant," whereby alone you can be purged from guilt: and "do not such despite to the Spirit of God," by whose all-powerful influence alone you can ever be truly sanctified and saved———But rather seek to be yourselves living witnesses of their truth and efficacy. Seek by the sprinkling of the blood of Christ upon your souls to obtain peace with God and in your own consciences: and seek by the effusion of the Spirit of God upon your souls to be renewed in your inward man, and rendered meet for heaven. So shall you in this world be "epistles of Christ, known and read of all men;" and in the world above be everlasting trophies of his redeeming love.]

2. Beware that you never attempt to separate what God has joined together—

[Some there are of a self-righteous turn, who look to sanctification only as the means of recommending them to God; whilst others of an Antinomian cast think of little but of justification through the Redeemer's blood. But both of these are involved in most grievous errors; and, if they obtain not juster views of Gospel truth, will perish for ever: for, on the one hand, there is no fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness, but that which is opened on Mount Calvary; nor, on the other hand, can any one that is unsanctified behold the face of God in peace: "without holiness no man shall see the Lord." If any take refuge in the doctrines of predestination and election, let them know, that God has ordained the means as well as the end; and that, if we are "elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father," it is "through sanctification of the Spirit unto obedience, and

[c] 1 Pet. i. 12.

and the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ[d]." Whichever of these truths any man confide in as of exclusive importance, we would say to him, as our Lord said to the self-deceiving Pharisees, "These ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone."]

[d] 1 Pet. i. 2.

MCXCII.

THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY VINDICATED.

1 John v. 7. *There are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one* *.

NEVER was there any record so well attested, so worthy of acceptation, so necessary to be believed, as that which God has given of his Son. Upon the receiving or rejecting of it depends the eternal welfare of all mankind. The riches of wisdom, and love, and mercy that are contained in it, surpass all the comprehension of men or angels. With respect to the truth of it, every species of testimony that could be given to it by friends or enemies, by angels from heaven, by men on earth, yea even by devils themselves, has been given in the most abundant degree. But it has been confirmed by other testimony still, even by the Three Persons in the adorable Trinity.

From the words before us, we shall be led to shew,

I. Who they are that are here said to "bear record"—

We need not wonder at the zeal which has been shewn by the adversaries of the doctrine in our text, to discredit the authenticity of the text itself; since, if the genuineness of the text be admitted, that alone will

* Any one who should preach on this subject can use his own discretion about the mode of introducing it. If he be perfectly assured that the words are an interpolation, he can state his views of that matter, and adopt the text, in order to shew, that, *though the words themselves are not authentic, the truths contained in them are truly scriptural, and important*: or he can take ver. 9 for his text.

will put an end to all controversy on the subject of the Trinity. On the other hand, we need not be anxious about the validity of this individual passage, as though the doctrine of the Trinity rested upon it; since, if the text were expunged from the Bible, there are a multitude of others which maintain most unequivocally the same important truth.

To establish the mysterious doctrine of a Trinity in Unity, we shall lay down, and substantiate, three positions:

1. There is but one God—

[The unity of God may be deduced even from reason itself: but it is repeatedly affirmed in Scripture[a]; nor must a doubt of it ever be suffered to enter into our minds. It is true, that in a subordinate sense there are gods many, and lords many; because angels, and magistrates, and the idols of heathens, are sometimes called by these names on account of the resemblance they bear to God in the authority vested in them, and the respect paid to them: but there is One Supreme Being, who alone is self-existent, and from whom all other beings, whether in heaven or earth, derive their existence. He, and he only, is God[b].]

2. Though there is only one God, yet there are three distinct Persons in the Godhead—

[In reference to this subject, we use the term *persons*, because there is no other so suitable: but we mean not that these persons are *in all respects* as distinct from each other as Peter, James, and John; but only that *in some respects* they are distinguished from each other, though they subsist together in one undivided essence.

It is certain that *there are three persons mentioned in the Scripture*: for baptism is ordered to be administered, not in the name of God merely, but in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost[c]." *These three are represented as distinct from each other*; for the Son has told us, that "he will send the Holy Spirit from the Father[d]." *They are moreover spoken of as performing separate offices in the work of redemption*; the Father elects[e]; the Son redeems[f]; the Spirit sanctifies[g]; and St. Peter, comprising in few words the whole mystery of redemption, ascribes to each of these persons his proper

[a] Compare Deut. vi. 4. with Mark xii. 29.
[b] 1 Cor. viii. 5, 6.
[c] Matt. xxviii. 19.
[d] John xv. 26.
[e] Eph. i. 4.
[f] Eph. i. 7.
[g] Rom. xv. 16.

proper office[h]. *They are also declared to be sources of distinct blessings to the Church;* the Apostle prays, that "the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost, may be with us all[i].]

3. Each of these persons is God without any difference or inequality—

[We shall not occupy any time with proving the Godhead of the Father; but, taking that for granted, shall establish the Godhead of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.

To each of these belong the same *names* as unto the Father. Is the Father *God?* so is the Word[k], (as Christ is called in the text). He is "Emmanuel, God with us[l]," God manifest in the flesh[m], the mighty God[n], God over all, blessed for evermore[o]. To Him is also given the incommunicable name, *Jehovah;* for we are to call him, "Jehovah our Righteousness[p]." To the Holy Spirit also these names belong. Ananias, in lying unto the Holy Ghost, lied unto God[q]. And we, in being the temples of the Holy Ghost, are the temples of God[r]. The words also which were confessedly spoken by Jehovah to the prophet Isaiah[s], are quoted by St. Paul as spoken by the Holy Ghost[t].

To each of these the same *attributes* also are ascribed as characterize the Father. Is the Father *eternal, omnipresent, omniscient, almighty?* So is the Son[u]———and so is the Holy Ghost[x]———]

What now is the conclusion to be drawn from these premises, but that which is asserted in the text, that "there are THREE that bear record in heaven; and that those Three are ONE[y]?"

Having

[h] 1 Pet. i. 2. [i] 2 Cor. xiii. 14. [k] John i. 1.
[l] Matt. i. 23. [m] 1 Tim. iii. 16. [n] Isai. ix. 6.
[o] Rom. ix. 5. [p] Jer. xxiii. 6. [q] Acts v. 3, 4.
[r] 1 Cor. iii. 16. [s] Isai. vi. 9, 10. [t] Acts xxviii. 25.
[u] Mic. v. 2. & Heb. xiii. 8.—Matt. xviii. 20. & xxviii. 20.—John ii. 25. & xxi. 17.—John i. 3. & Matt. xxviii. 18.
[x] Heb. ix. 14.—Ps. cxxxix. 7, 8.—1 Cor. ii. 10.—Gen. i. 2. & Job xxvi. 13.
[y] Hence we see how properly we are taught to express our belief of this doctrine in the Athanasian Creed: "We worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; neither confounding the persons, nor dividing the substance; for there is one person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Ghost: but the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost is all one, the glory equal, the majesty co-eternal... So that in all things the Unity in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity, is to be worshipped."

Having shewn that by the Three witnesses we are to understand the Tri-une God, we proceed to shew,

II. What that is concerning which they bear record—

We may well expect that the importance of the matter to which these Divine witnesses have borne record, is suited to the majesty of the witnesses themselves. Accordingly we find, that

Their testimony relates to the salvation that is in Christ Jesus—

[God, who had passed by the angels that fell, has looked in mercy upon fallen man, and has given us eternal life, in and through his Son Jesus Christ[z]. He sent his dear Son to die in our stead, and, by his own obedience unto death, to work out a righteousness whereby we might be saved. The merit whereby we are to be justified, and the grace whereby we are to be renewed, he treasured up for us in Christ; and he calls all men to receive these blessings out of his fulness. This way of salvation is open for all, and sufficient for all: but, this rejected, no other remains for us.

This is the sum and substance of the Gospel; and this it is to which the sacred Three bear record.]

Nor is their testimony at all more than the subject requires—

[If God himself had not revealed such things, *who could ever have imagined them?* who could ever have thought of God becoming incarnate, and, by his own death, expiating the guilt of his own creatures? Who could ever have devised a plan so calculated to exalt the perfections of God; so suited to answer the necessities of man; and so efficacious to renew us after the Divine image? ——— Besides, supposing these things to have been reported, *who would ever have believed them*, if they had not been thus Divinely attested? Notwithstanding the testimonies given by the Sacred Three, there is yet reason to adopt that reiterated complaint, "Who hath believed our report[a]?" Professions of faith indeed abound amongst us; but a true Believer, whose feelings and conduct accord with his professions, is "a sign and a wonder" in Christendom itself[b].]

It remains yet to be declared,

III. In what manner they bear record—

Each

[z] ver. 11. [a] Isai. liii. 1. John xii. 38. Rom. x. 16.
[b] Isai. viii. 18.

Each of these Divine Persons has borne record at divers times, and in different manners—

[*The Father* thrice bore witness to Christ by an audible voice from heaven; declaring at the same time his acquiescence in him as the Saviour of men; and requiring us at the peril of our souls to "hear" and receive him in that character[c]. Moreover, in raising Christ from the dead, he yet more emphatically testified, that he had discharged the debt for which he had been imprisoned in the grave, and was "able to save to the uttermost all that should come unto God through him[d]."

The Lord Jesus Christ continually bore witness to himself. When asked, "If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly;" he answered, "I have told you, and ye believe me not[e]." "Before Pontius Pilate he witnessed the same good confession[f]," though he knew that it would issue in his death. After his resurrection, he called himself "the true and faithful witness," and testified, "I am he that was dead and am alive again, and have the keys of death and of hell[g]."

The Holy Spirit also bore witness to him, when he descended in a bodily shape, like a dove, upon him: And again, when he came down in the likeness of fiery tongues upon the Apostles, and converted three thousand to the faith of Christ. Similar testimonies he still continued to give[h]; and at this very day, when any are converted to the faith, it is owing to the testimony which the Holy Spirit bears to Christ; "the Spirit testifies of him," and thereby produces conviction or consolation in the soul[i].

Thus the Sacred Three bear record in heaven, and by their united testimony encourage our acceptance of the salvation offered us in the Gospel.]

INFER,

1. How unreasonable and dangerous is unbelief!

[If only men, who are credible and competent witnesses, attest a thing, we think it right to believe them. What an insult then is it to the Sacred Three to doubt their testimony! Yet this, alas! is the treatment which their record meets with in the world. Some reject it as "a cunningly-devised fable;" while others, professing a regard to it in general, deny the most important part of it, the necessity of being saved by Christ alone. Even those who in their hearts approve the Gospel,

[c] Matt. iii. 17. & xvii. 5. & John xii. 28.
[d] Rom. i. 4.
[e] John x. 24, 25.
[f] 1 Tim. vi. 13.
[g] Rev. i. 18. & iii. 14.
[h] Acts x. 44, 45.
[i] John xv. 26. & xvi. 7—11.

Gospel, are too apt to doubt the freeness and sufficiency of the salvation revealed in it. Let every one consider the extreme sinfulness of such conduct, and abhor the thought of "making God a liar[k].]

2. What obligation lies upon Believers to bear an open testimony to the truth!

[It is evident how earnestly God desires that his dear Son should be known, and that the salvation wrought out by him should be embraced. Now Believers are his witnesses in the midst of a blind deluded world. Ought they then to be ashamed or afraid to bear their testimony for God? What if the world agree to call the Gospel a delusion, and to consider all as hypocrites or fanatics who embrace it? Should that deter us from making a public profession of his truth? Should we not rather be the bolder in confessing Christ, in proportion as others are bold in denying him?

But let us not confine our profession to creeds and forms: the best, and most acceptable, way of declaring our affiance in Christ, is by manifesting to the world its efficacy on our hearts and lives. *This* will make them think that there is a reality in the Gospel; and may contribute to win many who never would obey the written word.]

3. How exalted must be the glory which Believers still enjoy in heaven!

[It cannot be conceived that the Three Persons of the Godhead would have devised and executed such a wonderful plan of salvation, if the end to be accomplished by it were not exceeding glorious. Surely all that the love of the Father can devise, all that the blood of Christ can purchase, all that the Holy Spirit can impart, is prepared for us in the eternal world, and shall be bestowed on us according to our measure and capacity to receive it. Yes, in heaven we shall see God as he is, and have the brightest discoveries of his glory: And, while we have the richest enjoyment of his presence and love, we ourselves shall be witnesses for him, how far his mercy could reach, what astonishing changes it could effect, and what blessedness it can bestow on the most unworthy of mankind.]

[k] ver. 9, 10.

MCXCIII.

THE GOSPEL RECORD.

1 John v. 11, 12. *This is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life; and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son, hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God, hath not life.*

IN matters that are established by human testimony, we necessarily proportion our assent to the number and credibility of the witnesses. And if we will act in the same manner towards the holy Scriptures, we shall not entertain a doubt, either of their Divine authority in general, or of the way of salvation contained in them. Moses and all the Prophets concur with the Apostles in directing our eyes to Christ as the only Saviour of the world: but in the words before us we have the testimony of One whose information cannot be doubted, and whose veracity cannot be impeached; of One who is too good to deceive, and too wise to be deceived. This witness is no other than Jehovah himself.

Let us then consider,

I. His testimony concerning his Son, and concerning the way of salvation through him—

This record embraces two points; and asserts,

1. That "God hath given to us eternal life"—

[Since the fall of Adam, man has lost all right to life. In him we died, and through him condemnation is come upon us all. Moreover, we have all increased our guilt and condemnation by our own personal trangressions. But God willed not that we should perish, and therefore sent his only dear Son to deliver us: and, having opened a way for our return to him through the blood and righteousness of his Son, he has published the glad tidings, and offered freely to give eternal life to as many as would receive it in his appointed way. He has not tendered it to us as a blessing to be *earned* or *merited*, but as *a free unmerited gift to be received*[a].]

2. That "this life is in his Son"—

[This life, comprehending all the blessings of grace and glory, is in Christ as the *Proprietor*, the *Dispenser*, and the *Guardian*

[a] See Rom. vi. 23. Eph. ii. 8, 9. Tit. iii. 5.

Guardian of it[b]. He is the *Proprietor* of it. As the light is primarily in the sun, so is all good originally and essentially in Christ. "In him was life," says St. John; "and the life was the light of men[c]." The same writer says of him again at the conclusion of the chapter from whence the text is taken, "This is the true God, and *eternal life*[d]." He also is the *Dispenser* of it. As life was in him essentially as well as in the Father, so was it committed to him officially, in order that he might impart it to whomsoever he would[e]. He himself arrogates to himself this honour[f]; and all his Apostles acknowledge themselves indebted to him for all that they possessed[g]. He is moreover the *Guardian* of it. When life was entrusted to Adam, he, though perfect, and in Paradise, was soon robbed of it through the devices of Satan. And if it were now committed to us, we in our present fallen state should not be able to preserve it one single hour. God has therefore graciously committed it to his dear Son, that, by being "hid with Christ in God[h]," it might be inaccessible to our subtle enemy. By this mysterious, this merciful dispensation, "our souls are bound up, as it were, in the bundle of life with the Lord our God[i]." Christ "lives in us[k]," and "is our very life[l]:" and hence, "because he liveth," and as long as he liveth, "we shall live also[m]."]

Thus has God testified, that eternal life is to be sought as a free gift from him, and to be only *in*, and *through*, and *for the sake of*, the Lord Jesus Christ. But to see the full importance of this record, we must consider,

II. The declaration grounded upon it—

A more solemn declaration is not to be found in all the Inspired Volume. But let us consider,

1. What *is meant by* "having the Son of God?"

[The more simply this is explained, the more intelligible it will appear. Christ is represented as God's *gift* to man[n]: and we then receive that gift when we believe in Christ; or, in other

[b] For this just and elegant mode of expressing this idea, the Author is indebted to that very judicious Author, Mr. Robert Walker, of Edinburgh; whose four volumes of Sermons are well worthy of every man's perusal.

[c] John i. 4.
[d] ver. 20.
[e] Col. i. 19. John v. 21, 26. & xvii. 2.
[f] John x. 28.
[g] John i. 16.
[h] Col. iii. 3.
[i] 1 Sam. xxv. 29.
[k] Gal. ii. 20.
[l] Col. iii. 4.
[m] John xiv. 19.
[n] John iii. 16. & iv. 10.

other words, when we receive him for all the ends and purposes for which he is given. This is the explanation which St. John himself gives us[o]: and consequently we may then be said to "*have*" Christ, when we have received him, and are making use of him, as the source and substance of our spiritual life.]

2. What *depends* on our "having" the Son of God—

[Behold! nothing less than everlasting happiness or misery depends on this point.

He that has felt a desire after eternal life; and has sought it earnestly through Christ; and has received it from God as a free unmerited gift; and is looking to Christ to impart it to him yet "more abundantly[p]," and to preserve it in his soul; he who thus "lives by faith in the Son of God," has both *a title* to life, and *the very beginning and earnest* of eternal life in his soul. He can claim eternal life upon the footing of God's word. He can plead the promises of God[q]; and may be fully assured that he shall not be disappointed of his hope[r]. Indeed he has eternal life already begun in his soul[s]. He was once dead like others; but now he "is passed from death unto life[t]." The very act of living by faith in the Son of God proves to a demonstration, that he is alive, and that Christ liveth in him[u]. He may not indeed have a comfortable sense and assurance of his happy state; but he really liveth, and shall live for ever.

On the other hand, he that hath not so received and lived upon the Lord Jesus Christ, has no life in his soul: he is yet "dead in trespasses and sins:" and, so far from having any title to life, he is under a sentence of condemnation, and "the wrath of God abideth on him[x]." "Not having the Son of God, he hath not life." Whatever he may have, he hath not life. He may have learning, riches, honour, and even morality itself, according to the general acceptation of the term, but he has not life: and if he die in his present state, he must perish for ever: yea, if he were the first Monarch in the universe, he would in this respect be on a level with the meanest of his subjects; he would descend from his pinnacle of honour to the lowest abyss of shame and misery.]

INFER,

1. How *plain* is the way of salvation!

[Supposing the way of salvation to be such as has been already stated, how can words express it more clearly than it is expressed in the text? There is no learning requisite to explain it: it is level with the comprehension of the most unlettered

[o] John i. 12. [p] John x. 10. [q] John vi. 40.
[r] Isai. xlv. 17. [s] John vi. 47. [t] John v. 24.
[u] See Gal. ii. 21. before cited. [x] John iii. 18, 36.

tered man in the universe. Nothing is requisite for the understanding of it but humility of mind, and a willingness to be indebted for every thing to the free grace of God in Christ Jesus. If there be any difficulty, it arises only from the pride of our hearts that would mix something of our own with the finished work of Christ. The fact is, that salvation by faith alone is so plain and simple, that we are offended at it on account of its plainness and simplicity[y]. But let the weak rejoice, that what is hid from the wise, is revealed to them[z].]

2. How *suitable* is the way of salvation!

[If salvation had been to be merited and earned by our good works, who amongst us could have entertained a hope? If our works, imperfect as they are, were only to have eked out the merits of Christ, who could tell us the precise quantity and quality of the works that would have sufficed? In what doubt and suspense must we have been held all our days! And how would this way of salvation have suited persons in the situation of the dying thief, who are called away without having sufficient time to "make up their tale of bricks?" But a *gift* is suitable to all: a *free* salvation commends itself to all; and the more humbled we are under a sense of our own guilt and weakness, the more suitable will it appear, that we should receive all from Christ, and give all the glory of our salvation to him.]

3. What infatuation is it to substitute any other plan of salvation in the place of that which God has offered us!

[Suppose for one moment (though it is a horrid and blasphemous supposition) that we were wiser than God, and that we knew better than he did what was fit for him to do; still are we also "stronger than he?" and can we oblige him to alter his decrees? Vain hope! We may entertain as strong prejudices as we will, and load the Gospel with opprobious names; still that will be true and irreversible, "He that hath the Son, hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God, hath not life." Let all of us then cease to weave a spider's web; and accept with gratitude "the salvation that is in Christ Jesus."]

[y] 2 King v. 10—14. [z] Matt. xi. 25.

MCXCIV.

THE CHRISTIAN'S KNOWLEDGE OF CHRIST.

1 John v. 20. *We know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding that we may know him that is*

is true; and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ: this is the true God, and eternal life.

IT is thought by many, that the doctrines of the Gospel are uncertain speculations, and that the experience of them in the soul is nothing more than an enthusiastic conceit. We acknowledge that the mysteries of religion are in many respects beyond the grasp of our reason; and that the inward feelings arising from them can be judged of by those only in whose bosom they are found: yet neither the one nor the other can on this account be considered as uncertain: on the contrary, whenever they are mentioned in the Scriptures, they are spoken of as matters that are plain and unquestionable. In the text, and the two verses that precede it, the Apostle *thrice* repeats the assertion, "We *know*:"—"We *know* that he that is born of God sinneth not:" "We *know* that we are of God:" and then, *in reference both to the Gospel itself, and to his experience of its truth*, he adds a third time, "We *know* that the Son of God is come," &c.

From these words we shall be led to notice three things which Christians know in relation to their Lord and Saviour:

I. His advent—

The first Christians knew assuredly that the Messiah was come—

[To state all the grounds of their conviction, would be superfluous, and indeed impossible in a single Sermon. We shall confine ourselves to those which were most obvious and incontrovertible, namely, *the prophecies that were accomplished in him*, and *the miracles that were wrought by him*. When they saw that so many, so various, so minute, and (to appearance) so contradictory prophecies all united in him, and were fulfilled by him, they could not doubt but that Jesus was the person to whom they all referred. When, moreover, they beheld such numerous, such undoubted, such benevolent, and such stupendous miracles wrought by him in confirmation of his word, it was impossible for them to withhold their assent to the justice of his claims, unless they were altogether blinded by Satan and their own lusts.]

 But

But we have, if possible, yet clearer evidence than they—

[Many of the most remarkable prophecies were either not quite accomplished, or but just accomplished, when our Lord died; so that the fulfilment of them might *then* be questioned. But who can doubt whether Daniel's weeks of years[a] have not expired many centuries ago? Who can doubt whether "the sceptre which was not to depart from Judah, till Shiloh should come[b]," has not departed long since? Who can doubt whether the second "Temple to which the Messiah was to come[c]," has not long since been demolished?

But a further and most satisfactory proof of Christ's Messiahship is, that his Gospel was propagated so extensively, in so short a time, by such instruments, in opposition to all the prejudices and passions of mankind; and that, though every effort of men and devils has been exerted to root out Christianity from the earth, none have ever been able to prevail against the Church.

On these grounds then, in addition to the former, *we* may say, "We *know* that the Son of God is come."]

Moreover, we know also,

II. His character—

Many had been the impostors who had laid claim to the title of the Messiah. In opposition to all of these, the Apostle twice designates our Lord as "the true, the *only* true," Messiah; and, in the close of the text, specifies more particularly,

1. His personal character—

[Jesus is "the true God." St. John, more than all the Apostles, seems to have been studious to assert the Divinity of Christ. With this he opens his history of Jesus: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and *the Word was God*[d]." The whole Scriptures also concur to establish this important doctrine, that he who was "a Son born, was also the mighty God[e];" that he was Emmanuel, "God with us[f];" even "God manifest in the flesh[g]," yea, "God over all blessed for ever[h]." Nothing can be more clear than this fundamental point. Indeed the very name, "Son of God," so far from militating against his equality with the Father,

[a] Dan. ix. 24. [b] Gen. xlix. 10. [c] Mal. iii. 1.
[d] John i. 1. [e] Isai. ix. 6. [f] Matt. i. 23.
[g] 1 Tim. iii. 16. [h] Rom. ix. 5.

Father, was in the apprehension of the Jews themselves an assertion of that equality[l].]

2. His official character—

[Christ, as God, has life in himself essentially[k]: but he is also "the Author of eternal salvation" to all his followers[l]. As there is no other God but he, so is there no other Saviour[m]. It was he who *purchased* eternal life for us: none can claim any part of his glory in this respect: "his life was the ransom paid for us;" and by his obedience unto death we obtain righteousness and life. Moreover it is he who *imparts* eternal life to us: we receive it from him, who "is exalted to give it," and from "whose fulness alone it can be received." As we cannot merit it, so neither can we obtain it, by any efforts of our own: it is purely the gift of God through Christ[n]: and Christ, as "Head over all things to the Church," bestows it on whomsoever he will[o]. We know from Christ's own express assertion (and stronger evidence than that we cannot have), that he is "the way, the *truth*, and the *life*[p];" and to all eternity shall we ascribe our salvation "to him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood[q]."]

But it is yet further the privilege of all Christ's followers to know,

III. Their interest in him—

The knowledge which his people have of him is not a mere speculative acquaintance with his history, but an intimate connexion, or rather, a Oneness with him[r]. They are "IN Christ,"

1. By a federal relation—

[As Adam was a head and representative to all his descendants, so is Christ to all his spiritual seed[s]. They have communion with him in all his transactions upon earth, and in heaven: they are circumcised in him, baptized in him, dead with him, quickened with him, risen with him, seated in heaven with him[t]. We cannot indeed be said to have done or suffered *the same things* as Christ, (for to assert that we had fulfilled the law, or made atonement for sin, would be blasphemy,) yet by virtue of our relation to him as our Head and Representative, every thing which he either did or suffered, is, *as far as respects the beneficial effects of it*, considered

[l] John v. 18. [k] John i. 4. & v. 26. [l] Heb. v. 9.
[m] Acts iv. 12. [n] Rom. vi. 23. [o] John v. 21. & x. 28.
[p] John xiv. 6. [q] Rev. i. 5, 6. [r] John xvii. 21.
[s] 1 Cor. xv. 22. [t] Rom. vi. 4, 8. Col. ii. 12, 13. Eph. ii. 5, 6.

dered as though we had done or suffered it: and on this account we may claim, on the footing of justice as well as of mercy, all that he purchased for us, and merited on our behalf[u].]

2. By a vital union—

[The union of a member with the head[x], or of a branch with the vine[y], justly characterizes our union with Christ. Separate from him, we can do nothing[z]: we can perform no one act of the spiritual life, nor bring forth any spiritual fruit. The body and the soul are not more closely united than Christ and his people: he lives in them[a]; he is their very life[b]; they are one spirit with him[c].

Now this, no less than their federal relation to Christ, is *known* to all true Christians. They do not indeed at all times equally enjoy a sense of it in their minds; but, in proportion as they live nigh to God in the exercise of faith and love, they "have the witness of these things within themselves[d]." Temptation or sin may so weaken the assurance, that it shall be scarcely discerned: but when these obstructions are removed, and the Believer is walking closely with God, a holy confidence will almost invariably crown his labours, and fill his soul with peace[e].]

We shall conclude this subject with answering two QUESTIONS—

1. How do Christians obtain this knowledge?

[The text informs us: It is not from human teaching, or the power of reason, that this light springs up in the soul: it is Christ who "gives us an understanding to know him:" He, who opened the heart of Lydia[f], and the understandings of his own Apostles[g], enlightens the minds of Believers at this day, and "reveals unto babes and sucklings the things that are hid from the wise and prudent[h]." If then *we* would obtain this knowledge, let us not lean to our own understanding, but pray to him to open our eyes, and to "guide us into all truth" — — —]

2. What benefit do they derive from it?

[A merely speculative knowledge of Christianity expands the mind, and leads it to high and heavenly contemplations. But no tongue can utter the benefits arising from an experimental acquaintance with Christ: What just views does it give

[u] Rom. iii. 25, 26. 1 John. i. 9.
[x] Col. ii. 19.
[y] John xv. 1.
[z] ib. ver. 5.
[a] Gal. ii. 20.
[b] Col. iii. 4.
[c] 1 Cor. vi. 17.
[d] 1 John v. 10.
[e] 1 John iii. 21.
[f] Acts xvi. 14.
[g] Luke xxiv. 45.
[h] Matt. xi. 25.

give us of every thing in the world! What peace does it bring into the conscience! How does it disarm death of its sting! And what bright prospects does it open to us in the eternal world! O let a desire after the full blessings of salvation animate us in our inquiries after truth! Let us seek to have more enlarged views of Christ, and of our interest in him; and thus shall we be prepared for that complete vision of his glory, in comparison of which our present knowledge is but as a taper before the sun.]

MCXCV.

A MINISTER'S CHIEF JOY.

3 John 4. *I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.*

THERE subsists between a Minister and his people a relation which may not unfitly be compared with that of a father and his children. The metaphorical expression of a father is more strictly applicable to those whom a Minister "has begotten through the Gospel[a]:" but it needs not to be restricted to this sense: it may be used with greater latitude in reference to those over whom a Minister watches, and for whose benefit he labours, with parental anxiety, especially where the person to whom the paternal relation is ascribed is somewhat advanced in years. It should seem that Gaius, to whom St. John wrote this Epistle, was converted to the faith by the Ministry of Paul[b]: yet St. John properly includes him amongst his children, because he felt the same regard for him as for those who were the more immediate seals of his own Ministry; the whole body of his people being in his different epistles frequently designated by that favourite appellation[c].

Respecting the state of Gaius' soul, the Apostle had heard the most satisfactory account; so that he could not shew his anxiety for the bodily health of Gaius more strongly, than by wishing it to prosper *in every respect*[d], "even as his soul prospered." Having declared

[a] 1 Cor. iv. 15.
[b] 1 Cor. i. 14.
[c] 1 John ii. 1. & iii. 18.
[d] περὶ πάντων, ver. 2.

declared the joy which this information had afforded him, he states, in general, that he had no greater joy that what arose from such tidings as these.

From hence we shall take occasion to shew,

I. What is the great object of a Minister's desire in behalf of his people—

To bring men to the acknowledgement of the truth is the first labour of a Minister: and, till that has been effected, no other relation exists between him and them than that which he has by nature, or that which he has in common with all mankind. But when they have embraced the truth, and are become members of the family of Christ, then the Minister seeks their advancement in the Divine life—

[Christianity, as experienced in the soul, is not a sentiment, but a habit: it not merely informs the mind, but regulates the life: and, whilst it introduces "men from darkness unto light, it turns them also from the power of Satan unto God." Having brought souls to an enjoyment of Christ, and to a conformity to his mind and will, the Minister desires to see them walk in the truth,]

1. Consistently—

[He longs to behold in them a holy consistency; a high state of heavenly affections, and a careful attention to the duties of morality. Morality however will not satisfy him if detached from fellowship with God: nor will the most sublime intercourse with God in prayer and praise approve itself to him, if it be not accompanied with a conscientious discharge of every personal and relative duty———]

2. Steadily—

[In them he expects to find a steadiness that bids defiance to temptation, and cannot be diverted from its purpose, either by the allurements of sense or the terrors of persecution: he would have his converts to be "stedfast, immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord[e]." A fixedness of mind he regards as absolutely essential to the Christian character; and he is never satisfied with the state of his people unless he find that, in the midst of the severest persecutions, they are enabled to say, "None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto me, so that I may but finish my course with joy"———]

3. Progressively—

[This

[e] 1 Cor xv. 58.

[This is implied in the term "walking," which is a progressive motion necessary to the Christian life. There is no possibility of standing still in religion. Our motion, if not progressive, must be retrograde. Now, as a parent wishes to see in his children a gradual advancement towards maturity both in their bodily and intellectual faculties, so does a Minister long for his people's progress towards perfection. He hopes to see in them a more entire devotedness of heart unto their God and Saviour; evincing itself in a greater spirituality of mind, an increasing indifference to the things of time and sense, and a more laborious engagement in every good work———In a word, he wishes to see their progress like that of the sun in the firmament, "their path shining brighter and brighter unto the perfect day[f]."]

The emotions with which St. John beheld this conduct in Gaius were most sublime: and such they will be in every faithful Minister; as will appear, whilst we shew,

II. Whence it is that the attainment of that object fills him with such exalted joy—

St. John was not inferior to any one of the Apostles in holy joy. He had been pre-eminently favoured by his Lord and Saviour, insomuch that he was known by the name of "the Disciple whom Jesus loved." He had beheld his Lord transfigured on Mount Tabor, and shining forth in all the glory of the Godhead. He had lien in the bosom of his Lord, as on many other occasions, so especially on that evening when the commemorative ordinance of the Lord's Supper was instituted: yet even "he had no greater joy than to hear that his children walked in truth." Much more therefore may we expect that Ministers, less favoured than he, should have no joy more exalted than that which the sight or hearing of their people's prosperity affords them. This is their sublimest source of happiness;

1. Because it is by this only that the ends of their Ministry are answered—

[If the Minister impart to his children "the sincere milk of the word," it is, "that they may grow thereby:" or, if he set before them "the stronger meat" of the Gospel, it is, that those who are able to receive it may be the more nourished and

[f] Prov. iv. 18.

and strengthened for their future labours. If he see no growth in them, "he stands in doubt" whether they have ever been truly and savingly converted to the faith of Christ; and "he travails, as it were, a second time in birth with them, until Christ be fully and visibly formed in them[g]." But when he beholds the plants, which he is daily watering, thriving, and diffusing all around the fragrancy of holy and devout affections, he sees of the travail of his soul and is satisfied: and what the angels enjoyed at the first symptoms of their conversion, he enjoys from day to day: his very life is bound up in their welfare; and "he then lives, when they stand fast in the Lord[h]."]

2. Because by this only can God be glorified—

[Nothing brings more dishonour to God than an inconsistent conduct in those who profess godliness. The very name of God is often blasphemed through the misconduct of those who call themselves his peculiar people. The ungodly world are not content with condemning the offending individual; "they speak evil of the way of truth" itself, as though that countenanced and even produced the evils that have been committed. On the other hand, "the person who brings forth much fruit glorifies God," and "by his well-doing puts to silence the ignorance of foolish men." To a Minister who loves the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, and is jealous for the honour of his name, nothing can be more delightful than to see truth triumphing over error, and the kingdom of Christ exalted on the ruins of Satan's empire. On every fresh report that is brought to his ears, he will exclaim, "Hallelujah! for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth!"———]

3. Because without this they can have no hope of ever meeting their people in the realms of bliss—

[How joyful is the thought of that hour, when the Minister shall go with his people into the presence of his God, saying, "Here am I, and the children thou hast given me!" And how glorious will be the recompence of his labours, when he shall "have them as his joy and crown of rejoicing" to all eternity[i]! If an earthly parent hear of his children, that they are advancing visibly in every thing that is good, so that, though he have no hope of seeing them in this world, he feels assured that he shall meet them again at the right hand of God, and dwell with them for ever in his immediate presence; the thought of a temporary separation from them is swallowed up in the joy that the blessed prospect affords him. So it is with the spiritual Parent, when beholding or hearing of the prosperity of his children: for

[g] Gal. iv. 19, 20. [h] 1 Thess. iii. 8 [i] 1 Thess. ii. 19, 20.

for he knows that he shall "rejoice in the day of Christ, that he has not run in vain, or laboured in vain[k]."]

Permit me now to ADDRESS you,

1. In a way of retrospective inquiry—

[What report must I hear of you? What report have you to give me of yourselves? Has your walk been consistent, uniform, progressive? ——— Be assured, I am prepared to rejoice in your welfare with a truly paternal joy ———]

2. In a way of prospective admonition—

[Great and manifold are your dangers, whatever progress you may have made. That you may escape them, "take heed to God's word," and follow the steps of your blessed Lord: and look to him for all needful strength. "Be strong in him," and you shall "be more than conquerors through him" ———]

[k] Phil. ii. 16.

MCXCVI.

THE CHRISTIAN'S DUTIES.

Jude 20, 21. *But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.*

IN every age there has prevailed in the Church a proneness to depart both from the principles and practice of the Gospel. St. Jude in his day, writing to the whole Christian Church respecting "their common salvation," says, "it was needful for him to write to them, and to exhort them all to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints." At the same time he declares, that "ungodly men had crept in amongst the saints," and had not only grievously dishonoured the Gospel, but had "turned the very grace of God itself into lasciviousness," and vindicated their licentious practices as allowed and sanctioned by the Gospel of Christ[a]. Against the influence of such pernicious examples, the Apostle was anxious to preserve all who yet maintained their integrity.

[a] ver. 3, 4.

tegrity. He bade them remember, that the Apostles of our Lord had from the beginning taught them to expect, that such hypocrites and apostates would arise [b]: and he exhorted them so to walk before God, that they might hold fast their stedfastness even to the end. The directions which he gave them were such as could not but approve themselves to their judgment, and commend themselves to their inmost souls. The same dangers to the Church are existing still; and the same directions therefore are necessary for us, as well as for those in the Apostolic age. Permit me then to call your attention to them:

I. To the two former, as *instrumental to* your welfare—

"Build up yourselves, Brethren, on your most holy faith"—

[It is here supposed that you have embraced the faith, and that you are standing upon the true foundation which God himself has laid in Zion. But you must not be satisfied with having believed in Christ: for St. Paul says, "As ye have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him, rooted and *built up in him*, and established in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving [c]." Your faith is verily a "most holy faith:" in its nature, in its tendency, and in all its practical effects, it is "most holy;" and to build up yourselves more and more upon it is your bounden duty. Seek then to advance continually *in the knowledge of it*, in all its bearings, and in all its relations. View the whole mystery as planned by Infinite Wisdom, and formed into a covenant of grace; the Father undertaking to accept an atonement in our behalf; the Son engaging to offer that atonement in his own sacred person; and the Holy Spirit engaging to bring to Christ those who should be given him of the Father, and those whom he should purchase with his most precious blood. Eternity itself will not suffice to explore the wonders contained in this mystery; and therefore, like the holy angels, we should incessantly be searching into it, with a view to comprehend, as far as our limited capacities can reach, the wisdom of God displayed in it———

We should seek to grow also *in a simple reliance* on the Gospel of Christ, as of itself perfectly suited to us, and altogether sufficient for the necessities of the whole world. It is impossible ever to be too jealous upon this head; since the mixing

[b] ver. 17, 18. [c] Col. ii. 6, 7.

mixing of any thing with this foundation will subvert it utterly, and make void all that Christ has done and suffered for us[d]———

In a realizing sense of its excellency, we should also be making higher and higher attainments. There is a rest of the mind, and a satisfaction of the soul, which it is our privilege to possess; and which, in its sublimer actings, approximates very nearly to the felicity of the saints above. There is no measure of this in which we should rest. We are told, that, by believing in Christ, we may be elevated to "a joy that is unspeakable and full of glory, and may already (by anticipation) receive the end of our faith, even the salvation of our souls[e]"———

Yet not in these respects only, but in every possible view, we should "be building up ourselves on our most holy faith," and be daily manifesting our progress, and "making our profiting to appear" to all around us.]

At the same time be "praying continually in the Holy Ghost"—

[Of ourselves we can do nothing: our sufficiency even for a good thought, must be of God alone[f]: and from him it must be sought by earnest prayer. "He will be inquired of by us, before he will do for us" what in his covenant of grace he has promised to us[g]. If we ask not, we cannot have[h]: but, if we ask in faith, we shall have our joy increased to the full[i]. We must therefore go to God continually; seeking from him in the first instance the "spirit of grace and supplications[k]," by whose gracious influences alone we can approach him in an acceptable manner, and pray to him as we ought. "That blessed Spirit will help our infirmities;" and though he may not give us that fluency of utterance, or that enlargement of heart, which we may desire, "he will make intercession in us with groanings which cannot be uttered[l]," but which will enter the ears of our heavenly Father, "who knoweth the mind of the Spirit[m]," and will answer the petitions which are so dictated by him.

We are not indeed to expect any *miraculous* aid from the Holy Spirit: but a *gracious* influence we may expect; as St. Paul says, "Pray always with all prayer and supplication *in the Spirit*[n]." Nor need we be concerned whether we address our God in words conceived at the moment, or in a precomposed form: it is the frame of mind which God regards: and, if that be spiritual, our prayer, even though it consist only of a sigh, or a groan, shall come up with acceptance before him[o], and

[d] Gal. v. 2, 4.
[e] 1 Pet. i. 8, 9
[f] 2 Cor. iii. 5.
[g] Ezek. xxxvi. 37.
[h] Jam. iv. 2.
[i] John xvi. 24.
[k] Zech. xii. 10.
[l] Rom. viii. 26.
[m] ib. ver. 27.
[n] Eph. vi. 18.
[o] Ps. xxxviii. 9.

and shall bring down into our souls all the blessings both of grace and glory.

Whilst then we are building up ourselves on our most holy faith, we must be "pouring out our hearts before him" through the assistance of his good Spirit, and be bringing down from him such communications of grace and strength as our daily necessities require.]

The beneficial tendency of the two former directions being thus clear and manifest, let me call your attention,

II. To the two latter, as *perfective of* your welfare—

"Keep yourselves in the love of God"—

[*This was primary in the mind of the Apostle: the two preceding being urged only as conducive to it.* And certainly this is the great object which every Christian should keep in view, and at which he should aim day and night. To have a sense of "God's love shed abroad in the heart[p];" to "have the light of his countenance lifted up upon us[q];" to be going to him continually as a Father[r]; to "walk with him," as Enoch did[s]; and, like Abraham, to commune with him as a friend[t]; to "set him always before us[u];" to have no wish or desire but to please him[x]; to be "delighting ourselves in him[y]," as our God, our Portion, our eternal great Reward[z]: *This* is our wisdom; *this* is our happiness; *this* is our security. If we descend on lower ground, we are open to all manner of assaults: but who can reach us there? Who can break through to harm us, when we are "dwelling in God, and God is dwelling in us[a]?" We are "encompassed as with a wall of fire[b];" we are in a fortress that is absolutely impregnable[c]: we may defy the whole universe to "separate us from his love[d]."]

Let me then especially urge upon you this important duty. Live not at a distance from God: rest not in a formal acknowledgement of him: but endeavour to "walk worthy of him unto all pleasing:" get back, as far as possible, to the state of man in Paradise; and labour to walk as on the very borders of the eternal world. My Beloved Brethren, "let your conversation be thus in heaven[e]:" and let all the faith which you exercise, and every prayer that you utter, be, as it were, a breeze to fill your sails, and bear you forward to your desired haven; that "so you may never fall, but have an abundant entrance ministered

[p] Rom. v. 5. [q] Numb. vi. 26. [r] Rom. viii. 15.
[s] Gen. v. 24. [t] Jam. ii. 23. [u] Ps. xvi. 8.
[x] Col. i. 10. Heb. xiii. 21. [y] Ps. xxxvii. 4.
[z] Gen xv. 1. 2 Cor. vi. 16. [a] Zech. ii. 5.
[b] Prov. xviii. 10. [c] Rom. viii. 39. [d] Phil. iii. 20.

tered unto you into the kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ[f]."]

"Look also for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life"—

[However close your walk with God may be, you must not on that account lean in the least degree to your own righteousness, but must rely entirely on the mercy of God in Christ Jesus, and expect "eternal life solely as the gift of God for Christ's sake[g]." And for this you must be waiting, looking, longing, in a state of constant preparation, and of eager expectation. The very perfection of the Christian state on earth is this, to be "looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God[h]." Of many in the Corinthian Church the Apostle says, "they came behind in no gift, waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ[i]." Do ye then aspire after the same blessed attainment. "Let your loins be girt, and your lamps trimmed, and yourselves as those who wait for the coming of the heavenly Bridegroom;" that, when he shall come, you may "enter in with him to the marriage feast." Whilst you are in such a frame as this, all earthly things will lose their influence; and all attempts, whether of men or devils, to retard your progress be in vain. From my inmost soul therefore I would offer in behalf of you the prayer which St. Paul offered for the Thessalonian Church, *the prayer which so remarkably coincides with that of St. Jude in my text*, "The Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and a patient waiting for Christ[k]."]

APPLICATION—

[Settle it in your minds that *this* is true religion — — — *This* is the state in which it is both your duty and your privilege to live — — — and so living you are sure of mercy, and cannot fail of attaining that eternal life which the Lord Jesus Christ has purchased for you — — —]

[f] 2 Pet. i. 10, 11. [g] Rom. vi. 23. [h] 2 Pet. iii. 12.
[i] 1 Cor. i. 8. [k] 2 Thess. iii. 5.

MCXCVII.

AN ASCRIPTION OF PRAISE TO JEHOVAH.

Jude, 24, 25. *Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.*

BY

BY many this Doxology is considered as addressed to the Lord Jesus Christ: but though it is certain that by all the heavenly choir our most adorable Saviour is worshipped as one with the Father, without any distinction whatsoever, and that he is to be honoured in all respects by *us* precisely as the Father, yet we must be cautious never to strain any portion of Scripture for the purpose of honouring him; for, if we do, we give advantage to those who deny his proper Divinity, to represent all our worship of him as unauthorized and erroneous. The more fully we are assured of any doctrine, the more careful we should be not to establish it on a weak foundation; lest, when the foundation on which we have indiscreetly built is shaken, we be led to doubt the truth of the doctrine itself. Of the Divinity of our blessed Lord we have no more doubt than of any other truth of our holy religion: but in the passage before us we apprehend, that it is not to *Him in particular* that this Doxology is addressed, but to the Father. For, in several other passages, the Father beyond all doubt is addressed, and under the same character as is here described. St. Paul concludes his Epistle to the Romans thus: "Now to him that is of power to stablish you, ——— to God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ for ever[a]." In the Epistle to the Ephesians he again speaks in similar terms: "Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, unto him be glory in the Church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end[b]." So again, in his First Epistle to Timothy, he says, "Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen[c]." Those who would apply our text to Christ, think that it must refer to him, because he alone (as they imagine) presents his Church before the presence of his Father's glory: as it is said, "He loved the Church and gave himself for it, ... that he might present it

[a] Rom. xvi. 25, 27. [b] Eph. iii. 20, 21. [c] 1 Tim. i. 17.

it to himself a glorious Church, &c.[d]" But the very same thing is spoken of the Father also, of whom it is said, that, "by Christ, the Father reconciled all things to himself, ... even in the body of his flesh through death, to present us holy and unblameable and unreproveable in his sight[e]." I consider the text therefore as addressed to the Father: and, in order to a suitable improvement of it, will set before you,

I. The character of Jehovah as here described—

His wisdom and his power are altogether infinite: and we might, not improperly, speak of those two perfections as they are delineated in the holy Scriptures. But I conceive, that, though mentioned generally in the text, we should notice them *not as existing in himself,* but *as exercised towards his Church.*

Wonderful is *the wisdom* which he has displayed in his dealings with his people—

[Contemplate the plan of salvation through the incarnation and death of his only-begotten Son ——— What unfathomable depths of wisdom are here! ——— Well is it called, "The wisdom of God in a mystery!" To contemplate that, will be the employment of eternity.

Nor, if we entered into his particular dispensations towards his people, would this perfection appear in less bright colours, so "unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out." The experience of every saint will furnish abundant matter for adoration through all eternity; for "he has abounded towards every one of them in all wisdom and prudence" ———]

Nor is *the power* which he exercises towards them less stupendous—

[View the temptations with which every saint is beset ——— the enemies, even all the hosts of hell, with whom he has to contend ——— his utter incapacity to do any thing of himself ——— and yet his conflicts, his victories, and his triumphs ——— Must not that power be wonderful that is able to keep him, and effectual for his preservation even to the end? Yes verily, it is no less a power than that which was put forth to raise the Lord Jesus Christ himself from

[d] Eph. v. 25—27. [e] Col. i. 19—22.

from the dead, and to exalt him above all the principalities and powers both of heaven and hell[f].]

It is by *the united and continued exercise* of these two perfections, that he becomes "our Saviour"—

[In the name of "Saviour" he glories; and under that character he loves to be viewed by us. His perfections would indeed be the same, though never put forth for us, any more than for the fallen angels: but, as they are so exercised for our welfare, it becomes us to contemplate them in that particular view, and to render to him the praise which such manifestations of them demand. Reflect a moment on him as a "Saviour!" not merely as preserving us in our conflicts here, but as "presenting us faultless before the presence of his glory" in the world above — — — One moment's reflection upon his character in that view, will abundantly suffice to shew you,]

II. The dispositions with which it should be contemplated—

Beyond all doubt our hearts should be lifted up with devoutest affection towards him, as the Apostle's was; and should be filled,

1. With love—

[Review the character before described, and say, whether, though you yourselves were not the objects of his care, the very existence of those perfections ought not to endear him to your souls? How much more then, when from all eternity they have been consecrated to your service, and destined to be exercised for your good! — — — I call you then to love him, with all your heart, and all your mind, and all your soul, and all your strength — — —]

2. With gratitude—

[Go to the world above, and see and hear how all the glorified saints are occupied around the throne: what songs of praise are they singing night and day to God and to the Lamb! How do they all labour for utterance; and, by the very accumulation of the terms by which they strive to evince their gratitude, shew how inadequate even the language of heaven itself is to express the feelings of their hearts[g] — — — Thus then should it be with us: our whole life should be, as theirs is, one continued song of praise and thanksgiving[h] — — — Only consider what would have been your state at this hour, and to all eternity, if less wisdom or power

[f] Eph. i. 19—21. [g] Rev. v. 9—13. [h] Ps. cxlv. 1—7.

power had been put forth for you, and you will need no inducement to ascribe to him the glory due unto his name.]

3. With affiance—

[Where will you look for help, if not to him? Of whom besides can it be said that he has either wisdom or power to do such great things for you? With him alone is either wisdom or might sufficient for you. Go then to him: spread before him your every want: expect from him a supply in every hour of need, a supply suited to your wants and sufficient for your necessities. Never for a moment entertain a doubt of his kindness, his care, his all-sufficiency: for he is *God*, and not man; and therefore ye have not been consumed hitherto, nor shall any enemy prevail against you. Only bear in mind that "He is for you," and you may defy all the assaults both of earth and hell.]

CONCLUSION—

[At the close of his Doxology, the Apostle adds, Amen. Do ye also add, Amen, in the very same spirit as he did, and in the same spirit that the angelic hosts are doing it above. And seek to live in this spirit every day, and all the day long. Then, when death shall call you hence, you shall change your place, but not your employment; your sorrows, but not your songs.]

MCXCVIII.

CHRIST COMING TO JUDGMENT.

Rev. i. 7. *Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen.*

THE great subject of the book of Revelation seems to be, to predict the trials and deliverances of God's Church to the end of time. To a superficial observer, it would appear strange that God should permit his enemies to triumph for so long a period, and in so awful a degree. But there is a timecoming when all these inequalities in the Divine government will be rectified, and a righteous retribution be given to those who suffered, and to those also who inflicted the sufferings upon them. To this period our attention is directed in the very commencement of this prophecy; that persecutors may

know what tribulation awaits them, and the persecuted may be comforted in the prospect of their eternal rest.

Let us then contemplate,

I. The future judgment of our Lord—

Behold, he is surely coming to judge the world—

[Our blessed Lord is "ordained of the Father to be the Judge both of quick and dead"——— The time for his future advent, though not known either to men or angels, is fixed in the counsels of the Father: and at the appointed instant it shall arrive. The world will be sleeping in security and carelessness, as much as ever they were in the days of Noah: but it will not on that account be delayed: "it will come as a thief in the night, and as travail upon a woman with child"———With inconceivable glory will the Lord Jesus then appear, surrounded with myriads of the heavenly host, and "coming in the clouds of heaven"———His judgment-seat will be erected, the books wherein all the actions, words, and thoughts of men are recorded, will be opened, and all the universe be summoned to give an account of themselves to him———]

Then "shall every eye see him"—

[All who have ever lived, from the very commencement to the end of time, shall be raised from the dead, each in his own proper body. The sea as well as the land will give up the dead that are in it, and not an individual, however great or however obscure, be wanting———All will surround his throne, and behold him in full view; not as unconcerned spectators, but as criminals, whose cause he is about to try, and whose state he will fix in happiness or misery for ever and ever———]

Thus certain, and thus awful, will be "our gathering unto Jesus at the last day." But let us more distinctly consider,

II. Its aspect on the different classes of mankind—

The text more especially refers to the ungodly: but, as all will be equally interested in that event, we shall extend our views to the world at large; and consider the aspect of our Lord's advent,

1. On the ungodly—

["Those who pierced our Lord" in the days of his flesh, thought not that they should ever behold his face again: but

every

every one of them shall be summoned to his presence in that day. Pilate with the chief priests, and Herod with his men of war, and all the populace who demanded his crucifixion, and the soldiers who mocked him in gorgeous apparel and drove the crown of thorns into his temples, and those who ploughed long furrows on his back by scourging, and those who nailed him to the cross, and the soldier that pierced his sacred body after he was dead, and all who approved of those proceedings, shall in that day see him yet once more, with all the marks of their cruelty yet upon him: yes, they shall all recognise in his glorious person the Man whom once they treated with such indignity. But how widely changed the condition both of themselves and him! Themselves, no longer in a capacity to oppress; and him, no longer capable of suffering from oppression: themselves as malefactors and murderers; and him, as the Judge about to take cognizance of their offences: themselves, as children of the devil; and him, as "the Lord of glory!" Oh, with what horror will they be struck! with what dread will they be overwhelmed!

But are there not many who "pierce the Lord" at this time also, and "crucify him afresh," by continuing in their sins? Yes verily, there are many amongst us not a whit less criminal than his very murderers; I should rather say, far more criminal; inasmuch as they who reject him now, sin against incomparably greater light than was enjoyed by any previous to his crucifixion. It is this that makes the sin against the Holy Ghost so heinous, in comparison of the sins committed against the Son of man. The Holy Ghost has borne such testimony to the truth, as nothing but wilful infidelity can resist. And they who at this day hear the Gospel preached to them, and make no account of all the wonders of love and mercy that are set before them, have a measure of guilt which will make their last state worse than that of Sodom and Gomorrha. Think then, ye, who, having heard the truth, reject it, and, more especially, ye, who, having embraced the truth, dishonour it, or depart from it, think, I say, what will be your views and feelings, when you shall behold that Saviour face to face? Will ye not be ready to call upon the rocks and mountains to fall upon you, and to cover you from his wrath? Yes, indeed will ye; and if even the whole earth will wail because of him, much more will ye, who have received all his grace in vain.

The Apostle adds, "Even so; Amen:" by which I understand him, not merely as confirming the truths which he has before asserted, but as acquiescing in them as every way worthy of their Divine Author. *It is right* that those who once pierced him when on earth should wail because of him; and *it is right* that they also who reject him now should feel the full weight of

of his displeasure. St. Paul himself puts that matter beyond all doubt, when he says, "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maran-atha."]

2. On the godly—

[Blessed be God, though all the unregenerate shall wail, there are some to whom the Saviour's advent will be a ground of joy! We are told, that the saints "wait for his appearing," and "love it," and "look forward and haste unto it," and in the spirit of their minds are saying, "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly." However terrible his advent will be to others, it will not be so to them; for the prospect of being called to "meet the Lord in the air," is that which St. Paul teaches us to regard as a source of the richest consolation, under whatever trials or losses we may be called to sustain. "Comfort ye one another," says ye, "with these words."

But here you will naturally ask, Whence arises this difference between the two? Why do the one behold him with such anguish of heart, and the others with such unutterable joy? I answer, The godly have beheld him *here*, and "mourned before him as for an only Son[a]." They have seen how grievously they have themselves pierced him by their iniquities; and they have bewailed their guilt and folly with the deepest contrition. They have even looked to his wounds as endured for their transgressions; and have sought for "healing to their souls by the stripes inflicted on him:" and having done this by faith, they are accepted before God, and shall "be presented before him faultless with exceeding joy."

Seek ye then, Beloved, "the Spirit of grace and of supplications," whom God has promised to pour out upon you. Then shall you have such views of the Saviour as shall bring peace to your souls, and such views as will give you confidence before him at his future coming.]

[a] Zech. xii. 10.

MCXCIX.

ST. JOHN'S VISION.

Rev. i. 12—17. *And I turned to see the voice that spake with me: and being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks. And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle. His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire; and his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters. And he*

he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength. And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead.

IN order to obtain the Divine blessing, it is necessary that we should wait upon God in all the ordinances of his appointment. Yet God has not so restricted his favours, but that we may expect the communication of them to our souls wherever we be, provided our neglect of his instituted means proceed from imperious necessity, and not from an indifference to his commands. St. John was banished to the isle of Patmos, where he had no opportunity of assembling with the Church of Christ, and of sanctifying the Sabbath in the way to which he had been accustomed. But he sought the Lord in secret, and "was in the Spirit," that is, in a holy heavenly frame, "on the Lord's day:" and what was wanting to him in respect of external advantages, was abundantly compensated by an extraordinary vision of his Lord and Saviour.

We will,

I. Illustrate this vision—

In doing this, it will be proper to notice,

1. The person who appeared to him—

[This, though said to be "like unto the Son of man," was not a created angel, but the Son of man himself, even that Jesus, "who had been dead, but was living again, and was alive for evermore[a]." This glorious person appeared to John in a manner suited to the characters and circumstances of the different Churches; and in the Epistles, written to them, reference is continually made to this description of him. He is here described in his *situation*, *habit*, *appearance*, *voice*, and *attitude*.

1. In his *situation*.—There was in the temple a golden candlestick with seven lamps, to which it was the priest's office to attend[b]. This candlestick, which on account of the number of the lamps is considered as seven, represented the Seven Churches of Proconsular Asia: and "the Son of man standing in the midst of them," denoted, that he inspected the state of Churches and individuals, to observe how their light shone, to replenish them occasionally with fresh supplies of his

[a] ver. 18. [b] Exod. xxv. 31, 32.

his Spirit, and, by seasonable trials in a way of providence or of grace, to trim them, as it were, whensoever their dimness called for his special interposition.

2. In his *habit*.—The garments which he wore were such as were appointed for the High Priest[c]: and by this clothing he intimated, that, though he was in glory, he still executed the priestly office, presenting his blood before the mercy-seat, and "ever living to make intercession for his people." He would have it known to the Church that he is "a Priest upon his throne[d]."

3. In his *appearance*.—This was august beyond all expression or conception. His hoary "head," denoting both his majesty and wisdom, marked him out as "the Ancient of days[e]." His fiery "eyes" evinced, that he searched the heart and tried the reins, and penetrated the inmost recesses of the soul. His "feet" of fine and burning brass intimated, that, as all his steps were holy, so was his procedure firm and irresistible. His "countenance," shining as the meridian sun, displayed his excellency and glory, and his worthiness of universal love.

4. In his *voice*.—This, which was terrible, like the roaring of the tempestuous ocean, shewed, that, however his words had formerly been disregarded, it became all to attend to them with the deepest humility.

5. In his *attitude*.—He "held in his hand seven stars," (which represented the Ministers of the Seven Churches[f],) and thereby intimated, that all Ministers were under his direction and controul, and that they ought to shine for the good of men without regarding their menaces or assaults, since under his protection they could not but be safe. At the same time, emitting "from his mouth a sharp two-edged sword," he declared his power and determination to subdue his enemies, and either to subject them to himself as vessels of mercy, or to cut them asunder as monuments of his indignation[g].]

2. The effect of the vision—

[On almost all occasions the appearance even of an angel has produced much fear and terror in the minds of those to whom he came: no wonder therefore that such an effect should flow from the appearance of God himself. Manoah concluded that he must die, because he had seen God face to face[h]. Ezekiel[i], Daniel[k], and Paul[l] fell down before him, unable to sustain the brightness of his glory. Once indeed man could converse with his Maker face to face: but, since the introduction of sin into the world, he has been intimidated by a sense of

[c] Exod. xxviii. 4. [d] Zech. vi. 13. [e] Dan. vii. 9.
[f] ver. 20. [g] Rev. ii. 16. [h] Judg. xiii. 22.
[i] Ezek. i. 28. [k] Dan. x. 8, 9. [l] Acts ix. 4.

of guilt, and incapacitated for so high an honour; insomuch that the most beloved of all Christ's Disciples was overwhelmed at the sight of him, and "fell at his feet as dead."]

Not to insist any longer on the circumstances of the vision, we shall,

II. Deduce from it some pertinent observations—

1. They who suffer much for their Lord may expect peculiar manifestations of his power and love—

[John was now in banishment: yet, though suffering much by reason of hardships and privations, he was infinitely happier than Domitian on his throne. St. Paul also found, that, "as his afflictions abounded, so also did his consolations." Thus it shall be with all that suffer for righteousness' sake. What then have they to fear? Need they regard the reproaches of men, when they are so highly honoured by their God? Need they be concerned about losses, when they are enriched with such invaluable communications? Need they fear stripes, or imprisonment, when their trials may lead to such manifestations as these? ———]

2. We have reason to be thankful that our Lord reveals himself to us now through the medium of men, and of the written word—

[We see from the example before us how much we should be disconcerted by visions; and how unfit they would be, as stated means, of edifying the Church. But when God speaks to us by the instrumentality of men, we can attend with ease, and weigh with care whatever is brought to our ears. It is true, indeed, that many take occasion from this circumstance to despise the word, when otherwise they would tremble at it: but, on the other hand, myriads are "drawn to God by the cords of a man," who otherwise would only have brought upon themselves, like Pharaoh, an aggravated condemnation. Let us then improve this privilege; and, however weak God's instruments may be, let us attend to them with reverence, that his agency may be rendered visible in our experience[m] ———]

3. The brighter discoveries we have of Christ, the more shall we be humbled in the dust before him—

[The appearances of God to man have at all times tended to the humbling of their souls. Abraham and Moses no sooner caught a sight of him, than they hid their faces, from a consciousness of their own extreme unworthiness: and Job, though one of the most perfect of men, confessed himself "vile," and "abhorred himself in dust and ashes[n]." Even the

[m] 2 Cor. iv. 7. [n] Job xlii. 5, 6.

the Seraphims before the throne make use of their wings to veil their faces and their feet, and confess thereby that they are unworthy either to serve or to behold their God[o]. And would not a view of the Lord in his glory make us also to cry out, "Woe is me, I am unclean[p]!" Yes: a discovery of created things may puff us up: but a sight of God himself cannot but abase us in the dust — — —]

4. There is a day coming when the most stout-hearted sinner will tremble before him—

[If John, who had lien in the bosom of his Lord, and had seen him transfigured on the Holy Mount, and was in himself so eminently holy, so highly beloved; if he fell at the Redeemer's feet as dead, what will the ungodly do in the day of judgment? If, when God spake from Mount Sinai, the Israelites were so terrified as to desire that he would speak to them no more in such a way; and "Moses himself exceedingly quaked and feared;" how shall not the wicked tremble in that day, when Jesus shall appear in all his glory to judge the world? Let them laugh now if they will: but they will soon "call upon the rocks to fall upon them, and the hills to cover them from the wrath of the Lamb." O that to-day, while it is called to-day, they would hear his voice, and no more harden their hearts against him!].

[o] Isai. vi. 2. [p] ib. ver. 5.

MCC.

EPISTLE TO THE CHURCH AT EPHESUS.

Rev. ii. 1—7. *Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks; I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars: and hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted. Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent. But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh, will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.*

THE

THE epistles directed to the Angels, or Ministers, of the Seven Churches in the Proconsular Asia, were intended, not for the Ministers only, but for the Churches also over which they presided, and for all other Churches as far as their situations and circumstances might accord with them. Some have thought that they prophetically describe seven successive periods of the Church: but we are expressly told, that the whole vision recorded in the book of Revelation related, first, to what then existed; and, secondly, to what should exist at some future period[a]. Under the former class therefore must be arranged these seven epistles, which referred to the existing circumstances of the different Churches therein addressed.

In the introductory part of every epistle our Lord describes himself by some distinctive characters, that have an appropriate reference to the subject-matter of the epistle, and that correspond with the appearance which he had assumed, while he revealed these things to his servant John.

In this epistle, he has occasion to commend much that was good. Lest therefore his approbation should induce any to think highly of themselves, he reminds them, that "the seven stars were all in his hands," and that, as the light whereby they shone was derived from him, so was their continuance in their respective orbits the effect of his power. Moreover, having occasion also to reprove somewhat that was amiss, he tells them, that "he walked among the seven golden candlesticks," and was thereby qualified to judge how every lamp burned, and ready to execute on them such judgments as should either increase their light, or utterly extinguish it.

Let us consider,

I. His commendation—

[Three things he notices in them with approbation, namely, their *unwearied labour*, their *invincible patience*, and their *holy zeal*; having mentioned which, *he* REPEATS *and* AMPLIFIES

[a] Rev. i. 19.

AMPLIFIES *them all, in order to testify what delight he feels in noticing and applauding every thing that is good.*

Religion consists not in mere speculative notions, but in active and self-denying exertions. But if any will "labour" for God, he must expect also to suffer for him. There will be enough to try the "patience" of every one that will faithfully discharge his duties to God and man. The more he labours, the more occasion will he have for patience to bear the envy of false brethren, and the malice of an ungodly world. But when we both act and suffer "without fainting," then will our blessed Lord be glad to testify his acceptance of us and his delight in us.

In our endeavours to establish truth and piety, it will be necessary to watch the devices of our subtle adversary, and to counteract the plots whereby he endeavours to maintain his empire in the world. There were in the primitive Churches, and are at this time, Teachers who profess to enlighten the world by their superior knowledge, which, they say, Christ himself has imparted to them, and commissioned them to diffuse. But such high pretenders, when "tried" by the standard of God's word, will often be found "false apostles, and deceitful workers[b]," yea, little better than the lewd, idolatrous "Nicolaïtans." Yes, there are Antinomian heresies now, no less than in the Apostolic age; and, while we pity those who propagate them, we must expose their principles and abhor their practice. Mark the spirit of these men: mark the ends which they propose to themselves: mark the effects of their doctrines on their followers: and it will soon appear "whose they are, and whom they serve." This zeal may be called bigotry; but it is such bigotry as the Apostles practised[c], and our Lord approves[d].

In amplifying the fore-mentioned virtues, our Lord specifies that which constituted their chief excellence, namely, that in them the people had respect to the honour of "his name." Had they been actuated by a self-righteous, a vainglorious, or a party, spirit, they had received no such commendations from him: their works would have been considered by him as of no value. But, seeing that they had a regard to his honour and glory, the very meanest of their services, even "the giving of a cup of cold water," was highly pleasing in his sight.]

II. His complaint—

[The

[b] 2 Cor. xi. 13.

[c] 1 John iv. 1. & 2 John 10. Tit. iii. 10. 1 Cor. v. 2—5.

[d] See the peculiar manner in which ver. 6. is introduced in the text, after the subject had been fully stated in ver. 2.

[The season of espousals, as in the natural, so also in the spiritual, world, is, for the most part, a season of love[c]. But the first ardours in religion too often abate, even where the external conduct continues irreproachable. Thus it was with the Church at Ephesus: their works, with respect to the matter of them, were good: but there wanted that holy and devout affection which characterized that people in their first conversion: they had "left their first love." On this account, he who searched their hearts and tried their reins was justly displeased.

Some there are who look upon a declension in spiritual affections rather as a mark of growth than of decay. And we are ready to acknowledge, that *the fervour which arises from novelty, and exists merely in our animal spirits,* may be lost, without any injury to our souls. But can our esteem of God be lessened, our desire after him languish, or our delight in him be diminished, without our contracting guilt and suffering loss? No: such a dereliction of our former experience is sinful in the extreme. For, do not all the grounds of our love to God still continue as strong as at any former period of our lives? Yea, have they not increased every day and hour? and consequently should not our love have increased together with them? Would not an indulgent husband be offended, if his incessant attentions to his wife were requited with a diminution of her affection towards him, even though, from a sense of duty, she managed with unceasing assiduity his family concerns? Shall not God then be displeased with such a requital of all his kindness? Yes: the Believer, who declines in the inward exercises of his affection to God, shall surely hear of it from him, however worthy he may be of commendation for his diligence in outward duties. The Lord Jesus is a jealous God; and sooner or later he will surely say to us, "I have somewhat against thee." O let us search and try our ways, that we may not oblige him to come to us in a way of judgment, when he would rather come in a way of love and mercy!]

III. His admonition—

[To recollect those seasons when we have enjoyed intimate access to God, and had his glory revealed to us, is a profitable exercise. We should do well to compare the frame of our minds in those seasons with the state into which we too often relapse. O what a humiliating difference shall we see! When we were on the Mount, how impossible did it appear that we should ever so degenerate, as to be altogether insensible as the very stones? Yet how often is that the real state of our souls!

But, while we "remember from whence we are fallen," let us

[c] Jer. ii. 2.

us also "repent" with anguish and sorrow of heart. We are apt to speak of such changes as though they did not involve us in any guilt; yea, as though they were as necessary to our welfare as the alternations of summer and winter. That God may bring good out of them, we do not deny: for he overruled for good even the crucifixion of his dear Son: but that such experiences are evil, is clearly manifest; for if God himself change not, our love to him should also be unchangeable. Let then the variations in our frames be marked as grounds of deepest humiliation and contrition.

But we must not be satisfied with deploring what is amiss: we must awake from our slumbers, and "do our first works." How was it with us formerly? Did our eyes run down with tears of penitence; were our hearts penetrated with an admiration of the Divine mercy; did we set apart seasons for solemn fasting and prayer; did we give up ourselves to God in a perpetual covenant; did we read his word with avidity, and set ourselves to practise every lesson we found in it; was it our delight to visit the sick, relieve the poor, instruct the ignorant; was religion our business and our chief joy? Let us then "repent, and do our first works." Repentance without reformation is no repentance.

Nor let it be thought that any thing less than such a return to God as this will suffice. The counsel here given by our Lord is not mere advice, but a solemn warning, applicable both to Churches and to individuals. If a society of Christians degenerate in their zeal and love, they may expect, as Ephesus at last had, to have their candlestick removed, and the light of the Gospel taken from them. And if an individual continue in a state of declension after having been warned of his guilt and danger, he can hope for nothing but to have his remissness punished by a long and painful withdrawment of the light of God's countenance, if not also by final dereliction and desertion. And the more secure he may imagine himself to be, the more *suddenly* and unexpectedly will the judgment be inflicted on him. Let not any one then imagine, that a performance of duties, however punctual, however zealous, will supersede the necessity of ardent and unfeigned love; since it is the inward affection of the soul that gives to every service its chief value. The backslidden Christian must return: he must so return, as really to delight himself in God. To do this, or to perish, is his only alternative.]

IV. His promise—

[Our blessed Lord did not think it unsuitable to use menaces on some accounts towards those, whom, on other accounts, he was happy to commend. Yet it was not by fear only that he would work upon them. He loves a willing service:

service: and therefore, while he stimulated them by a dread of his displeasure, he encouraged them also by the expectation of a rich reward.

The tree of life which was in the midst of Paradise was to our First Parents a pledge of eternal happiness, provided they continued to maintain their innocence during the season allotted for their probation: but, when they had sinned, they were driven from it; and Cherubims, with a flaming sword, were placed at the entrance of the garden, to prevent their future access to it. But a new way to it has been opened by our blessed Lord. What was lost in Adam is restored in him: and he, as the supreme Governor of the universe, bestows on whomsoever he will its delicious fruits. The tree indeed to which he introduces us is that which the former only typified; or rather, it is the felicity itself, of which that was only a pledge and emblem. It is no other than the glory and happiness of heaven: and *this* our adorable Saviour promises to all his victorious followers. It is not sufficient for a person to enlist under his banners, and gird on his armour, and fight manfully for a season: he must "overcome," in order to obtain the reward of victory: he must "endure unto the end, in order to be saved." But can any one contemplate the promised blessing, and not labour to obtain it? Can any one that has ever tasted "how gracious the Lord is," recede from the combat, and forego, through weariness or timidity, the certain prospect of dwelling with him for ever? Let those who have experienced any declension in their love to God survey the prize; and they will not hesitate to return to him with their whole hearts, and to maintain their conflicts even unto death. Whatever difficulties may be to be encountered, or whatever trials to be endured, one taste of that heavenly fruit will recompense them all. Let the delightful prospect then animate us in our warfare; and let us "be faithful unto death, in order to obtain the crown of life."]

APPLICATION—

[Many have "ears, but hear not:" but "if any man have ears to hear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches," and to himself in particular. It is indeed no more than a human voice that speaks; but the words are the words of the living God.

Have you then an evidence that the commendation belongs to you? Rejoice: and be thankful to him who has enabled you thus to move, and thus to shine. Yet be not high-minded, as though there were nothing in you deserving of reproof. It may be, that the heart-searching God discerns in you some secret faults, some inward declension, for which he

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is justly angry; and which, if not speedily rectified, will bring upon you his heavy displeasure. Examine carefully therefore what is the present state of your soul. As for past experiences, they will rather aggravate than extenuate your guilt, if your fervour be abated or your love diminished. It will be well also to set before your eyes the prize for which you contend. Behold your Lord ready to receive you into the paradise of God, and to feast you with its richest fruits. Only let these alarming, and encouraging, considerations produce a suitable and combined effect upon your minds, and we have no doubt, but "the love that has waxed cold" will be revived; and that which is in any measure wavering, will be established.]

MCCI.

THE EPISTLE TO SMYRNA.

Rev. ii. 8—11. *And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive; I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich,) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan. Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.*

SMYRNA was a city of Ionia, next in size and importance to Ephesus. The letter addressed to the Church there differs materially from the preceding, inasmuch as the former was mixed with reproof and menaces; whereas this contains nothing but commendation and encouragement.

The description which our Lord gives of himself, is, in this epistle also, appropriate to the contents of the epistle, and to the circumstances of the Church. They were already tried, and were to endure yet heavier trials for his name's sake: but if they were enabled to lay down their lives for his sake, they were to enjoy a future life, which would far overbalance all their present sufferings. He therefore proclaims

proclaims himself to them as "the first and the last," the eternal, immutable Jehovah, on whose promises they might depend; and as their "dead, yet living" Saviour, from whose death they derived all their hopes, and in whose resurrection they had a pledge of their own resurrection to eternal happiness and glory.

In the contents of the epistle we notice,

I. His testimony respecting them—

Apprising them that he "knew their works," he gives his testimony,

1. By a direct affirmation—

[The Church at Smyrna, like that at Ephesus, was in a state of grievous persecution: their property had been seized and confiscated, and they were reduced to extreme poverty. Yet they bore their trials with "patience," and "took joyfully the spoiling of their goods:" they had learned that difficult lesson, to "glory in tribulations."

This meek submissive spirit was united, it should seem, with a very low opinion of their own attainments: they were "poor in spirit," and thought themselves as poor in spiritual things, as they were in temporal. But our blessed Lord, who "seeth not as man seeth," declared that they were "rich." Amidst all their straits, they possessed "the true riches[a];" they were rich towards God[b]," "rich in faith[c]" and "good works[d]," rich in possession and in reversion too. How precious must such a testimony have been from their God and Judge!]

2. In a way of contrast—

[There were among their persecutors some who called themselves "Jews," or God's peculiar people, and (probably) blended Judaism with Christianity; but who, by their principles and conduct, evinced that they were "blasphemers" of the Lord Jesus, and that they composed rather a "Synagogue of Satan" than a Church of Christ. These also Jesus "knew," and perfectly distinguished. He saw through their cloke of hypocrisy and presumption; and attested that they were worshippers and servants of the devil rather than of him: while, on the other hand, he beheld the distinguished piety of his own people; and, notwithstanding the veil of humility with which it was hidden from their own eyes, proclaimed them to be "rich in the estimation of their God."]

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[a] Luke xvi. 11. [b] Luke xii. 21.
[c] Jam. ii. 5. [d] 1 Tim. vi. 18.

The condescension is yet further marked in,

II. The encouragement he gave them—

However great their trials had been, they were speedily to be augmented in an alarming degree. But the Lord Jesus, forewarning them of their approaching difficulties, bids them "not fear any of those things which they were about to suffer:" for that,

1. Their trials were limited—

[Satan is indeed the arch-persecutor of the Church. Men, of whatever rank and condition, are only his instruments; though it must be confessed they are willing agents in that diabolical employment. God foresaw that a storm was gathering; and that it would involve the Church in much calamity. But he informs his people, that all events were under his government; and that Satan could prevail no further than he saw fit to permit him. Satan would have cast, not "some" of the people, but *all;* not "into prison," but *into hell;* not "for ten days," but *for ever;* not "that they might be tried," but *that they might perish.* But the time, the measure, the extent, the operation of their trials was in higher hands. Hence our Lord says to them, "Fear them not:" 'they are permitted only for your good:' "no temptation shall come, without either a way for your escape, or strength sufficient for your burthen[e]." As such a portion of water only is suffered to come upon a mill as will accomplish the ends designed, and the rest is diverted to another channel; so Jesus assures them, that no more tribulation should come on them than should subserve the purposes of his grace, and issue in their benefit.]

2. Their services should be rewarded—

[It might appear hard to them to be called to surrender up their lives for him, and to submit to a cruel death. But he promises that, whatever pain they might suffer in their first death, they "should never be hurt by the second death," or take their portion in "that lake of fire, where all the *fearful* and unbelieving" must have their everlasting abode[f].

But, as though this were not sufficient encouragement, he tells them, that the life they sacrifice shall be recompensed with "a crown of life," a state of inconceivable dignity, and everlasting bliss. He himself, as the Sovereign Arbiter and Judge of all, engages to bestow it on them as the reward of victory; a reward indeed of grace, and not of debt; but yet "a sure reward," and an abundant recompence for all their toil. Even in the

[e] 1 Cor. x. 13. [f] Rev. xxi. 8.

the transition from a general address to a particular application of the subject to each individual, we may notice an emphasis well calculated to impress the mind with the certainty and importance of these precious truths: "*Ye* shall have tribulation," says he; but then he adds, "Be *thou* faithful unto death, and I will give *thee* a crown of life."]

ADDRESS,

1. Those who despise and persecute religion—

[Many there are, at this day, so immersed in the pursuit of riches and honour, that they overlook religion, or consider it as the bane of society. Were Dives and Lazarus before their eyes, they would think there was no room to doubt which was the richer of the two. But be it remembered, that he who feareth God is rich, whatever he may want; and he who feareth not God is poor, whatever he may possess. And though it may appear a light thing to oppress or ridicule the despised followers of Christ, there is One who will espouse their cause, and assign to their enemies a portion with that wicked fiend, whose agents they are, and whose will they execute. O that worldlings and scoffers would lay these things to heart!]

2. Those who make a profession of religion—

[It is not every one who calls himself a Christian, that will be considered as a Christian in the day of judgment: nor is the truth of men's professions to be estimated by the confidence with which they are made. Many who, from a sense of their remaining infirmities, dare not number themselves among the saints, will be found amongst them in the last day, while many self-confident professors will be excluded from their society, and be numbered with Unbelievers. It is "he who humbleth himself that will be exalted; whereas he who exalteth himself shall surely be abased." Let us then examine whether we have real poverty of spirit: *that* is the primary characteristic of true riches; and the want of it is an infallible mark of our subjection to Satan.]

3. Those who serve God in simplicity and godly sincerity—

[Are you tried already? Prepare for new trials: perhaps for fines, imprisonments, and death. As long as Satan has a vassal in the world, so long will he use him as an instrument to harass, and, if possible, to destroy the Church of God. But your enemies are all in God's hands. If they were left at liberty, they would devour you in a moment: but they are chained; and, however wrathful they be, they can no more injure you, than Laban or Esau could wreak their vengeance on the defenceless Jacob. Moreover, your conflicts will be but

but short, your pains but transient. Your torments will end, when those of your oppressors will commence: and your lives will be renewed in glory, when theirs will terminate in everlasting misery. Be therefore faithful unto death in imitation of your Lord; and he will exalt you to a participation of that bliss, which he himself enjoys upon the throne of God.]

MCCII.

THE EPISTLE TO PERGAMOS.

Rev. ii. 12—17. *And to the angel of the Church in Pergamos write; These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges. I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth. But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumbling-block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaïtans, which thing I hate. Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth, saving he that receiveth it.*

THROUGHOUT all these epistles we cannot but be struck with the majesty of Him, at whose command they were written. To him, as the omniscient, omnipotent Jehovah, it appertains to discern infallibly the works of all, to denounce his judgments against those who harbour any allowed iniquity, and to encourage his faithful servants with assurances of eternal happiness and glory.

Having occasion in this epistle to reprove with severity some members of the Church, and to threaten them with his heavy displeasure, he describes himself as "having the sharp sword with two edges" issuing from his mouth, in readiness to inflict the threatened punishment upon them, if they do not instantly repent.

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The method observed in all the epistles is uniformly the same: but we shall endeavour to diversify it in our explanation of them. The epistle before us suggests three important truths; That *fidelity in trying times is highly pleasing to God*; That *it must, however, extend to the repressing of sin in others as well as in ourselves*; and, That *its reward will far overbalance any conflicts that may be necessary to maintain it.*

I. Fidelity in trying times is highly pleasing to God—

The fidelity of those at Pergamos was worthy of commendation—

[The place where they dwelt was eminently "the habitation of Satan," yea, the very "seat of his empire;" inasmuch as the most flagrant enormities were committed there, not only in respect of idolatrous and lascivious practices, but in a bitter rage against Christ himself. Persecution had been carried there to the utmost extremity, even to the murdering of Antipas for his exemplary piety. Yet in the midst of these cruel scenes the Church at Pergamos had maintained their integrity: they "had not denied the faith," notwithstanding the danger to which it exposed them; but "had held fast the name of Christ," determining to suffer death rather than abandon it.]

Wherever such fidelity is, it shall not escape the notice of our Lord—

[A profession of godliness in a place where religion meets with approbation and applause, is no proof of virtue: it may be sound, or it may be hypocritical: it must be brought to the test, before its intrinsic worth can be ascertained. Time and place must be taken into the account before we can absolutely determine the quality of our profession. We cannot say that Satan's throne is in this place, because a persecuting spirit is by no means the character of its inhabitants: but that he "dwelleth" here, is, alas! too manifest: the iniquities that abound amongst us, abundantly demonstrate his powerful and malignant influence. To preserve our fidelity therefore *here*, is no small commendation, especially to those who are more immediately exposed to the allurements of sense, or to the loss of reputation and emolument. If in the midst of ridicule we are not ashamed of Christ, and in spite of menaces are enabled to confess him boldly before men, we may assure ourselves, that we shall receive a testimony of approbation from him who "knows our works."]

But,

But, however,

II. It must extend to the repressing of sin in others as well as in ourselves—

It was no light offence, in our Lord's estimation, that those at Pergamos neglected to purge out the evil that was among them—

[The Balaamites and Nicolaïtans maintained the innocence of idolatrous concessions and licentious indulgences: and the Church at Pergamos were not sufficiently zealous to proceed against them in a way of censure and excommunication. This remissness was a heinous crime: and our Lord declared that, if they "repented" not of it, he would "come quickly and fight against them, with the sword of his mouth," by giving them over to such tremendous judgments as their predecessors in iniquity had endured[a].]

And are not *we* equally bound to guard against those who either patronize or commit iniquity?

[We must "in any wise rebuke our brother, and not suffer sin upon him[b]." It is not sufficient that we "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness; we must also reprove them[c]." The Church of Christ is a society which would be dishonoured and injured by retaining a corrupt member. We must act towards them as we do towards our bodily frame. We suffer the amputation of a limb rather than permit the whole body to be endangered: so also must we pluck up "every root of bitterness in the Church, lest any remain to defile others" by its noxious influence[d]. We know that "a little leaven will leaven the whole lump:" and on that account we must search out whatever may cause a fermentation in the Church, and must labour to preserve it, as far as possible, unmixed with the leaven either of sin or error[e]. Nor is this a matter of small importance. The neglect of it must be "repented of;" a vigilance in executing this painful office must take place of that supineness which too generally prevails. At all events the judgments of God will come on the hypocritical professors: they too, who are in many respects upright, will also be involved in similar calamities, if by consent or connivance they be partakers of the same sins[f].]

Let not, however, this fidelity be thought too much: for,

III. Its

[a] Numb. xxxi. 16. with Rev. xix. 15.
[b] Lev. xix. 17.
[c] Eph. v. 11.
[d] Heb. xii. 15.
[e] 1 Cor. v. 6, 7, 13. Tit. iii. 10.
[f] Rev. xviii. 4.

III. Its reward will far overbalance any conflicts that may be necessary to maintain it—

[The call to special attention that occurs in every epistle, stands invariably in immediate connexion with the promise: and for what reason is this, but to shew us that our Lord desires the willing obedience of a child, rather than the reluctant services of a slave?

The reward of victory is of course confined to the victorious: but oh! how great it is! The "hidden manna," which is promised as the everlasting food of our souls, was typified by that on which the Israelites subsisted in the Wilderness; or rather, by that which was treasured up in a golden vessel, and deposited by the ark[g]. The "white stone" that shall be given us, alludes to that which in courts of judicature was put into the hands of those who were acquitted, while a black one was given to the condemned; and consequently it denotes that full assurance of acquittal which we shall have at the judgment-seat of Christ. But what is the "new name that shall be written on this stone?" Is it not the "name of sons and of daughters;" a name, the import and felicity of which cannot be conceived by any but those who possess it? Behold then the reward promised to the victorious saint! he shall live on "angel's food" in the very presence of his God; and shall have such an enjoyment of his high privileges as no words can express, no imagination can conceive.

And now put this in opposition to any conflicts which we may be called to sustain in this our warfare: are reproaches any thing? Are losses, imprisonment, and death any thing, when placed in a scale against these high privileges, these eternal blessings? Surely such a promise as this should swallow up every inferior consideration, and we should be ready to brave death in its most tremendous forms, in hopes of securing the possession of all this blessedness and glory!]

APPLICATION—

[Let us not, through cowardice, betray the cause of Christ, or, through false notions of candour, relax the discipline that is thus solemnly enjoined. Let us rather look unto the end, which will so richly recompense our toils; and, if crowned with martyrdom for our fidelity, let us consider it as a ground, not of sorrow and complaint, but of joy and thanksgiving[h].]

[g] Heb. ix. 4. [h] Phil. ii. 17, 18.

MCCIII.

THE EPISTLE TO THYATIRA.

Rev. ii. 18—29. *And unto the angel of the church in Thyatira, write; These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass; I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works; and the last to be more than the first. Notwithstanding, I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols. And I gave her space to repent of her fornication, and she repented not. Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds. And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know, that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works. But unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak; I will put upon you none other burthen: but that which ye have already, hold fast till I come. And he that overcometh, and keepeth my words unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations; (and he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers;) even as I have received of my father. And I will give him the morning star. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.*

THOUGH these epistles to the Seven Churches of Asia resemble each other in their outward form and general scope, yet there is a diversity in their parts, which renders each of them as interesting and instructive as if it had existed alone.

In the foregoing chapter, the person who spake to John was said to be "like unto the Son of man:" and here he is declared to be "the Son of God," even the only-begotten of the Father. The description which he gives of himself in this, as in all the other epistles, accords with the subject of the epistle itself, and represents his infallible discernment of the states of men, together with the pure, equitable, and resistless operations of his providence towards them:

"His

"His eyes are like unto a flaming fire; and his feet are like fine brass."

In opening the contents of the epistle, we shall notice,

I. The characteristic excellence of this Church in general—

The virtues for which they are commended, are such as distinguish every true Christian—

["Charity," or love to God and man, is the sum and substance of all religion: and so essential is it to the Christian character, that, whatever else we might possess, or whatever we might either do or suffer for the cause of Christ, we should, if destitute of this, be no better than "sounding brass, or tinkling cymbals[a]." This charity, however, is not a mere inoperative feeling, but a lively, active principle, that engages us in the "service" of God and man, and especially in ministering[b] to the bodily and spiritual wants of our fellow-creatures. "Faith," whether we understand it of an affiance in God, or of fidelity towards him, is also a distinguishing feature of the true Christian, whose very profession leads him to "live by faith on the Son of God," and to devote himself unreservedly to the service of his Lord. In the performance of his duties, he will indeed have need of "patience:" he is called to "take up his cross daily," and to be conformed to his Lord in sufferings, as well as in holiness and in glory. In all these "works" the Church at Thyatira had attained a considerable proficiency; insomuch that the heart-searching God bore testimony to their distinguished eminence. Can the same be spoken respecting us? ———]

But their chief excellence was, that their piety had been continually progressive—

[It had been said of the Church at Ephesus, that "they had left their first love:" but of Thyatira it is observed, that "their last works were more than their first." How blessed and honourable a distinction was this! Yet this must be the experience of all who would secure the happiness of heaven. If once we "put our hand to the plough, we must never look back again[c]." However eminent our righteousness may have been, it shall all be forgotten, if we turn away from it[d]. Our "path must be like the shining light which shineth more and more unto the perfect day[e]." Inquire then, my Brethren; can this be said of us? Are we really "growing in grace[f]," and

[a] 1 Cor. xiii. 1—3. [b] τὴν διακονίαν. [c] Luke ix. 62.
[d] Ezek. xxxiii. 12, 13, 18. [e] Prov. iv. 18. [f] 2 Pet. iii. 18.

and "making our profiting to appear unto all men[s]?" Have we reason to hope that, on a comparison of our present state with that in which we were at any former period, our "charity" is more fervent, our "service" more abundant, our "faith" more stedfast, our "patience" more invincible, and our "works" altogether more consonant with our obligations and professions? — — —]

Nevertheless this was not the character of all in that Church; on which account our Lord proceeds to state,

II. The guilt and danger in which some of her Members were involved—

A most fatal imposture was tolerated among them—

[Who it was that is here designated by the name "Jezebel," or whether there were more than one, we cannot say: it is not improbable that several were engaged in seducing others: at all events, whether one or many, they were justly called "Jezebel," because of their resemblance to that abandoned woman. She, though married to Ahab, retained her zeal for idolatry, and used every device to support and propagate it. Thus at Thyatira, some, who professed themselves Christians, were idolaters in heart, and exerted themselves in the most subtle methods to disseminate their principles; yea, they even pretended to a Divine commission, to draw others to a compliance with their idolatrous practices, which in Scripture language is "fornication" and "adultery." These persons had "space given them to repent; but they repented not:" and their obstinacy in sin greatly heightened both their own guilt, and the blame attaching to those who tolerated them in the Church. It is true, the Members of the Church were not invested with any civil authority, and therefore could not punish the offenders with the sword. But they should have united in condemning the sentiments and conduct of these impostors, and, by a sentence of excommunication, have purged out this leaven from among them.]

Against those who had thus sanctioned the imposture, God denounced the heaviest judgments—

[In these threatenings there is a striking reference to what had been accomplished towards Jezebel, and her family. She had shed the blood of Naboth in Jezreel; and both her husband's blood and her son's blood were licked by dogs, in the very same place where dogs had before licked the blood of

[s] 1 Tim. iv. 15.

of Naboth; yea, she herself also was devoured by dogs, almost on the same spot[h]: and soon afterwards the whole family of Ahab, even seventy sons, were put to death. Thus God threatened, that, for their spiritual fornication, he would "cast them into a bed, and those who committed adultery with them into great tribulation, and that he would kill the teachers, and their followers, with death." He further declared, that, as in the case of Jezebel, their sin should be so visibly marked in their punishment, as to manifest to the whole Church, that the Saviour, whom they thus despised, was indeed the omniscient Jehovah[i], and the righteous Judge of all. He did indeed still offer to pardon them on their repentance: but, if that offer, like those which had preceded it, should be slighted, his vengeance would come upon them to the uttermost.

And is there not, at this time also, a remarkable correspondence between the judgments inflicted on false teachers, and the sins which they commit? The contemners of vital godliness, whether of the infidel or Antinomian class, are filled with pride and presumption: and God "gives them over to delusion, till they believe their own lie," and "perish in their own corruptions." O that both the deceivers and deceived might "repent them of their deeds:" and that all who have hitherto maintained their stedfastness, might so zealously oppose the incursions of sin and error, as to preserve themselves and all with whom they are connected, "blameless unto the day of Christ!" If however this warning be slighted, let it be remembered, that "the end of all shall be according to their works."]

But this evil was only partial in the Church; as we see by,

III. The injunction addressed to her more consistent Members—

Many there were among them who had no intercourse with the impostors, nor were at all infected with their errors—

[To recommend their sentiments, the impostors represented them as "depths," which none but persons of their superior wisdom could fathom. But they were depths "of *Satan*," and not of God; such depths as owed their existence to Satan, and were propagated altogether by his influence. With such pernicious doctrines the more pious among them would

[h] 1 Kin. xxi. 9, 10, 19, 23. & xxii. 38. & 2 Kin. ix. 25, 26, 36, 37.

[i] Mark the force of the words, "I am he that searcheth;" i. e. that I possess that which is the prerogative of God alone.

would have no acquaintance: they would not so much as listen to them: but, discerning at once their evil tendency, they rejected them with abhorrence.

It would be well if Christians at this day would imitate them in this respect. But, alas! Many have "itching ears:" and though they know before-hand the malignant tendency and baneful effects of Antinomian doctrines, they will gratify their curiosity at the risk of their souls; and often flutter round the candle till they perish in the flames.]

To these our Lord enjoined nothing but stedfastness in the truths they had received—

[He would not lay upon them any needless "burthen," or painful trial, beyond what they at present endured[k]. But it was indispensably necessary that they should maintain their holy principles, and pious practices, firm unto the end. Many would be their temptations to "make shipwreck of their faith and of a good conscience:" but they must "hold fast" both the one and the other: nor ever relinquish either, till the Lord Jesus Christ himself should "come" to reward their fidelity.

Such is the injunction given to all the servants of the Lord. None have made such proficiency as not to need it: for, as long as we are on the field of battle, we are in danger of being vanquished, unless we fight manfully in dependence on our God. Who that considers the fall of Solomon, must not fear lest he himself also should "be led away with the error of the wicked, and fall from his own stedfastness." Who that had seen him, endued with such consummate wisdom, and leading the devotions of the people at the dedication of the temple, would have thought that his heart should ever be drawn away by foolish women to renounce his God, and to build temples for idols? "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall." And let the prospect of our Lord's coming to judge the world, make us diligent, that, in that day, we may "be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless."]

We pass on to notice,

IV. The encouragement given them to maintain their integrity—

To the stedfast and victorious, our Lord promises two things:

1. That they shall "have power over the nations"—

[As this promise is made to those only who have "kept Christ's

[k] The word "burthen" seems to refer to 2 Kin. ix. 25. before cited.

Christ's words unto the end," it cannot be understood of any temporal dominion which the Church shall enjoy. It relates rather to that exalted state to which they shall be raised, when all the powers of this world, which now oppress the Church, shall meet with their deserved recompence. Our blessed Lord, *as Mediator*, has "received authority from the Father" to judge the world[l], and to break in pieces his enemies "as a potter's vessel[m]." And in that day he shall smite them as "with a rod of iron;" his people also, as assessors with him in judgment[n], shall concur in his sentence, and "have dominion over their enemies in the morning of the resurrection[o]." As Joshua commanded the captains of his army to come and put their feet upon the necks of the vanquished kings[p], so will the Great Captain of our Salvation make those who have fought under his banners to participate the glory and felicity of his triumphs.]

2. That they shall "have the morning star"—

[Christ himself is "the Morning Star," that shall introduce us to the enjoyment of an eternal day[q]: yea, "in his light we shall see light[r]." His people, while in this world, are not unfrequently in a state of darkness: but in the world above, the clouds shall be for ever dissipated; and "the Sun of righteousness shall arise upon them" in all his splendor. O glorious morn, in comparison of which the light of sublunary joys is but the delusive shining of a glow-worm! Yet thine eyes shall see it, whoever thou art that "keepest the words of Christ, and overcomest" the enemies of thy soul. Wilt thou not then exert thyself, thou drooping saint? Wilt thou not fight yet a little longer, and continue to hold fast the faith and holiness of the Gospel? Be of good courage: "He who hath promised, is able to perform." Soon shall thy conflicts end in victory; "thy light also shall rise in obscurity and thy darkness be as the noon-day." "The Lord shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended[s]."]

APPLICATION—

[You cannot be too often, or too earnestly called to "hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches." O pray for "an hearing ear, and an understanding heart." Never were counsels more suitable, reproofs more just, encouragements more reviving, than those administered in these epistles. "Hear" then particularly the commendation given to Thyatira, and seek that it may belong to you also. "Hear" the reproof, and learn to guard against every one that may seduce you "from the

[l] John v. 22, 27. [m] Ps. ii. 8, 9. [n] Luke xxii. 29, 30.
[o] Ps. xlix. 14. [p] Josh. x. 24. [q] Rev. xxii. 16.
[r] Ps. xxxvi. 9. [s] Isai. lx. 20.

the simplicity that is in Christ[t]." "Hear" the advice, that you may be stedfast in the faith; and "hear" the promise, that you may be encouraged to persevere in your warfare, till every enemy shall be put your under feet.]

[t] 2 Cor. xi. 3.

MCCIV.

THE EPISTLE TO SARDIS.

Rev. iii. 1—6. *And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things saith he that hath the seven spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God. Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief; and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee. Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white; for they are worthy. He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches.*

IF we thought, as some do, that the epistles to the different Churches in Asia were descriptive of the state of the Church at large in successive periods of time to the end of the world, we should be ready to fix on this epistle above all others as characterizing its present state. There is much profession of religion in the world, and somewhat also of the reality; but very many, who have the form of godliness, are either wholly destitute of its power, or so inanimate as to excite suspicions that they are "dead." To such persons our Lord directed this epistle; which contains,

I. Advice to the backslidden—

Many are in a state of spiritual deadness, while they are high in the estimation of their fellow-creatures—

[It is no difficult matter to "have a name to live." If we turn

turn from gross sins, and attend on the ordinances of the Gospel, and embrace its fundamental doctrines, and associate with the decided followers of Jesus, we are considered as religious persons. It does not become the godly to scrutinize us too narrowly, or to refuse us the right hand of fellowship till they have infallibly ascertained our state: they are rather to rejoice in every appearance of good, and to exercise towards us, that "charity which hopeth all things." Hence it necessarily comes to pass, that many are regarded as pious characters, who have never been truly converted unto God, or, if converted, are in a low and languishing condition. Such is the state of those whose "works are not perfect before God." They are essentially *defective*[a] before him; they are either partial in their obedience, performing some duties while they neglect others; or they perform every duty in a very poor imperfect way; having the shadow of piety without the substance; the form, without the life. Their repentance wants contrition: their faith has no power to realize invisible and eternal things: their hope does not bear them forward with energy in the pursuit of heaven: their love is unassimilating, uninfluential.]

But their state is perfectly known to the Lord Jesus Christ—

[He "who has the Seven Spirits of God, that is, who possesses in himself, and imparts to others, the Holy Ghost in his manifold and perfect operations; and "who has the seven stars" in his hand, inspecting their motions, and upholding them in their orbits, He, I say, must of necessity discern the hearts of men: he may justly arrogate to himself the office of judging; for he can say with truth, "I know thy works." It does not appear that there was any flagrant violation of God's law among them, or any toleration of principles fundamentally erroneous; for then they would have been condemned on these accounts as the other Churches had been: but while they were externally blameless, he "found," and testified, that their inward state was lamentably defective. It is in vain then to think that we can deceive him: he "weighs," not our actions only, but "our spirits;" and accounts no service valuable, which is not done "in spirit and in truth."]

Such persons then should strive by every possible method to strengthen their decayed graces—

[Our Lord counsels them to "be watchful" against whatever may have occasioned their spiritual declensions. Has the care of this world, or the deceitfulness of riches, enervated your minds? Watch against their influence in future. Has any secret lust gained an ascendancy, and retarded your progress?

[a] οὐ πεπληρωμένα.

gress? Watch against its first risings, and against every thing that may call it forth into act and exercise. Has sloth rendered you remiss in the duties of the closet? Watch, lest it yet further prevail to draw you from God, and to indispose you for those exertions, which are more than ever necessary for your welfare. "Remember also how thou hast heard and received; and hold fast, and repent." Call to mind the feelings that you experienced when first you received the truth into your hearts: *then* perhaps you thought that nothing could ever divert you from the path of duty: *then* the concerns of the soul seemed to swallow up every inferior consideration: but *now* "how is the gold become dim, and the fine gold changed!" Remember this; and "hold fast" those good impressions, those holy purposes, those strenuous exertions, which characterised the time of your espousals. "Repent" also, oh! repent bitterly, on account of your departure from God: let every sin, whether of omission or of commission, be mourned over, and forsaken. Call forth "the dying remnants" of your grace, and endeavour to "strengthen them" by exercise and habit. Beg of God also to "strengthen you with might by his Spirit in your inward man," that, through his effectual operations, the embers of your love may be rekindled to a flame, and the whole work of salvation prosper in your souls.]

Those however who despise this counsel, will surely be visited with some awful and unexpected judgments—

[A thief, breaking in upon us in the night, fills us with alarm, and spoils us of our property. Yet the terror and loss which we sustain by his means, are undeserving a thought in comparison of that dismay which self-deceiving professors shall experience, when Christ shall summon them to his tribunal, and pass upon their deserved doom. We know indeed that persons in an unprepared state are apt to suppose that their Lord will not come without giving them some previous notice, that they may trim their lamps, and get themselves in readiness for his appearance; they expect this favour at his hands, *because they are unprepared:* but this is the very reason why they are not to expect it: yea, Christ assigns this as the very reason why "he will come in an hour when they look not for him," and withhold from them those intimations of his approach, which he might otherwise have vouchsafed unto them. O think of this, ye who are in a declining state! Instead of being more secure than others, you are in greater peril; by your declensions you have provoked the Lord in a peculiar manner; and, if you turn not speedily to him, and with your whole hearts, you will be made distinguished monuments of his righteous indignation.]

Together

Together with these admonitions to backsliders, our Lord suggests,

II. Encouragement to the stedfast—

There are some stedfast even amongst the most degen te Churches—

[There were "a few even in Sardis who had not defiled their garments," though walking in the midst of manifold temptations, and exposed to the influence of such bad examples. In this place also we would hope there are "a few," who, knowing the defiling, yea, the damning nature, of sin, flee from it as from the face of a serpent. We do not indeed imagine that they can walk in such a corrupt world as this, and never contract a spot, for "in many things we all offend;" but from wilful, deliberate, and habitual sin they are delivered; nor can all the examples of hypocritical professors, any more than the scoffs of an ungodly world, induce them to violate the laws of God. Perhaps they may not have so great "*a name*" in the Church as some who are insincere; (for true piety, though it cannot be concealed, is unobtrusive and retired;) but they are circumspect in their conduct, and watchful over every motion of their hearts. Happy, happy few, who are enabled to maintain this heavenly course!]

These shall be distinguished with peculiar honour and felicity *in this world*—

[White garments were worn in processions as emblems of joy and triumph: and they were also the appropriate habits of the priests, whose superior sanctity they were intended to denote. In reference to one or other of these customs, or perhaps to both, our Lord promises that his faithful people "shall walk with him in white." At all events we cannot but remark the striking coincidences between the work and the reward: they "kept their garments undefiled," and "they shall walk with him in white." They devoted themselves to Christ; and they shall "walk with him:" they loved holiness; and they shall be made holy in heart and life. They sought the destruction of their spiritual enemies; and they shall enjoy a triumph over them. They shall be thus rewarded, because "they are worthy." Not that they have in themselves any thing which *merits* this reward, or forms a ground whereon they can claim it as their due: but they have *a meetness* for this reward, and *therefore* they shall possess it; and the more meetness they have for the enjoyment of spiritual and eternal blessings, the more abundant measure shall be imparted to them.

This promise *principally* indeed refers to the eternal state, and declares the felicity of those who shall be stedfast unto the

the end: but it includes also their present happiness; to which we have rather confined our comment, on account of the more determinate meaning of the words that follow.]

They shall also have their happiness consummated *in the world to come*—

[When their victory is complete, then shall their reward also be perfected. And here again we see that their reward even in heaven accords with their experience when on earth. They delighted in purity; and they shall be clothed in the unspotted robe of the Redeemer's righteousness; yea, their own righteousness too[b] shall be pure and perfect; for they shall be holy as God is holy, and perfect as God is perfect. Moreover, the joys and triumphs which they experienced here, shall there be completed in their measure, and perpetuated in duration. They may, while in this world, entertain some fears, lest their names should not be found in the Lamb's "book of life;" but, however Christ may erase from the Church's list the names of those who were held in reputation, but were really dead, he "never will blot out their names from the book of life:" there they are recorded; and there they shall stand for ever. The formal and self-deceiving professors were ashamed of them, as too enthusiastic and precise: but their Lord and Master will not be ashamed of them; he will confess them before his Father and his angels, and welcome them to his habitation, saying, "Come, ye blessed children of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world."]

APPLICATION—Hear now,

1. Ye, who pride yourselves on your moderation in religion[c]—

[We do not stand forth as advocates for any thing immoderate or excessive: we know that there is such a thing as enthusiasm; and that it is greatly to be dreaded and condemned. But we know that thousands, under the pretence of moderation, sacrifice all that is valuable in religion. They guard more against what they imagine to be excessive, than against ten thousand defects. Their fears all lie on the side of zeal and earnestness. They would have us repent of our sins *moderately*; and pray to God *moderately*; and love the Lord Jesus Christ *moderately*; and seek the welfare of our fellow-creatures *moderately*; and follow

[b] Rev. xix. 8.

[c] A Minister, in using such expressions as follow, must take heed to *his own spirit*: if spoken with seriousness and solemnity, they will carry strong conviction to the mind; but, if spoken *sarcastically*, they will rather do harm.

follow after holiness, &c. *moderately*. But would they have a man running a race, run *moderately?* or one fighting with an enemy, fight *moderately?* The truth is, they are contented to "have a name to live, though they be really dead;" and would have none to exceed their measure of godliness: but, if they do not awake from their slumbers, they will find to their cost, that, to "love God with all our heart, and mind, and soul, and strength, and our neighbour as ourselves," was the standard to which we were bound to aspire; and that to aim at any thing less, was the sure road to perdition.]

2. Ye "few," who are despised for your singularity—

[We do not plead for *needless* singularity: but if ye cannot abstain from sin, and devote yourselves unreservedly to God without singularity, be singular. The approbation of your Judge will amply repay the obloquy cast upon you by profane scoffers, or proud pharisees, or formal hypocrites. Live for God; and "let your light shine before men." Faint not on account of difficulties or oppositions; but "war a good warfare," and expect in due time the spoils of victory. "The Spirit that speaketh to the Churches," speaks these things to you: and may you hear them with an obedient ear, and be numbered at last among those, who "not only hear the sayings of their Lord, but do them also!"]

MCCV.

THE EPISTLE TO PHILADELPHIA.

Rev. iii. 7—13. *And to the angel of the Church in Philadelphia, write; These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth; I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name. Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan (which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie); behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee. Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth. Behold, I come quickly: hold fast that which thou hast, that no man take thy crown. Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him*

my new name. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

THOUGH the commendations bestowed on this Church are not so copious and energetic as those in which some others are addressed; yet the members of it are distinguished above all the others, except the Church in Smyrna, in that nothing peculiarly reprehensible was found in them. Nor is such a mediocrity of character at all uncommon. There are many, whose piety, though not the most exalted, is without that unhappy alloy, which, in a variety of ways, debases and degrades the profession of some eminent Christians.

The epistle sent to them suggests to us three important observations:

I. That the strength which the Lord's people have, is derived from him—

The Church at Philadelphia, though possessed of little strength, had grace to be faithful—

[They had but "little strength" in comparison of what some Christians attain, and in comparison of what might have been expected to spring from the advantages they had enjoyed. But, such as it was, it enabled them to "keep Christ's word," and boldly to confess "his name," though in the midst of great temptation to "deny" it.

But such is the operation of true grace wherever it is found: it will make those in whom it is, to "keep the word of Christ" as the only rule of their faith and practice; and resolutely to confess him before men, whatever means be used to intimidate or dismay them. And if any think that they have the grace of God, while they are not thus influenced by it, "they deceive themselves and the truth is not in them."]

But this strength they altogether received from Christ—

[Christ, in the introduction to his letter, describes himself by his personal and official character. He is not only true and holy in all his words and works, but he is *exclusively* "the true and holy One;" which is a character that belongs to God alone. To him also, in his official capacity as Mediator between God and man, is delivered "the key of David," or the dominion over all the tribes of Israel[a]. He, like Eliakim, his type, disposes of every event with sovereign and uncon-

[a] Isai. xxii. 20—22. with Rev. i. 18.

uncontrolled authority. He opens or shuts the doors of heaven and of hell. He opens also "a door of utterance" for his Gospel, and a door of entrance into the hearts of men, according to his own will[aa]. And he it was that "had set before those at Philadelphia an open door, so that none, whether men or devils, could shut it." It was through him that they had embraced the truth, and held it fast: and, though great efforts had been used to wrest it from them, they were enabled by him still to maintain an open and consistent profession of his Gospel.

To him also we, both in our individual and collective capacity, are indebted for the ordinances we enjoy, and for the use we are enabled to make of them. We have not wanted many who have striven to deprive us of our privileges, and to draw us back unto perdition: but we may "set up our Ebenezer this day, and say, Hitherto hath the Lord helped us."]

The promises moreover that were made to those of little strength, shew,

II. That, though it be small, yet, through him, it shall finally prevail—

Various are the enemies with whom the Church has to contend—

[Some are within the Church itself, "pretending that they are Christians," but manifesting, both by their sentiments and conduct, that "they are of the synagogue of Satan." It has been said, quaintly indeed, but with great truth, that wherever God has a church, the Devil has a chapel[b]: for wherever the truth is preached, there come in persons, who never would have troubled the ungodly about religion, but will use great diligence and ingenuity to turn the godly from the simplicity that is in Christ: and so specious are they frequently in their appearance and conduct, that they beguile many unwary souls, and turn many unstable persons from the faith.

Other enemies of the Church are open persecutors, who strain every nerve, by ridicule and threats, perhaps too by cruel oppression, to overcome the zeal and stedfastness of God's people. The persecutions that were in the first ages, and especially that under Trajan, which seems to be here referred to, were exceeding bloody. We indeed are, through the

[aa] 1 Cor. xvi. 9. & Col. iv. 3. with Acts xvi. 14.

[b] If the Reader bear in mind, that, in the text, Satan is said to have "a Synagogue," he will not judge the observation so *light* as it at first sight appears.

the goodness of God, protected by the laws, so that we cannot be treated with that arbitrary and lawless cruelty that was exercised towards the first Christians; but we are no strangers to "persecution for righteousness' sake;" on the contrary, it is as common as ever, though it shew itself only in a milder way.]

But if we use the strength we have, Christ will enable us to overcome them all—

[It had been foretold by Isaiah, that the enemies of the Church should, especially in the Millennial period, be converted, so as to make open and unreserved acknowledgements of their errors and iniquities[bb]. To Philadelphia in particular it was promised, that this honour should be conferred on them as a recompence of their fidelity and patience. But we must not confine this effect to that age. We have seen, in every age and place, that infidels and heretics have been convinced of their folly, and been constrained to confess that the despised followers of Jesus are eminently and exclusively "the objects of his love."

Deliverance also from the various "temptations that come upon the world," or, at least, an effectual support under them, is promised to those who exert themselves to maintain their integrity. Wonderful have been the interpositions which God has sometimes vouchsafed, in order to protect his faithful people. But where he suffers them *apparently* to fall under the power of their enemies, he enables them, by faith and patience, to be more than conquerors: nor shall earth or hell ever finally prevail against them.]

We are still further encouraged to put forth our little strength, since we are assured,

III. That the victories wrought by it shall be gloriously and eternally rewarded—

The reward promised to those at Philadelphia was expressed in very exalted terms—

[It is plain, that heaven is here spoken of as the Temple of God, "the place where his honour dwelleth." And our Lord promises, that his victorious saints shall be "made pillars in that temple." Whether he referred to the brazen pillars which Solomon had raised in the porch on the outside of the Temple, we cannot say[c]: but, as there were no inscriptions on those pillars, we rather think the allusion is to what frequently obtained in the heathen temples. It was not uncommon for conquerors to have pillars or monuments erected near, and sometimes in, the temples of their gods. On these there were inscriptions, which commemorated the name of the

[bb] Isai. lx. 14.

[c] 1 Kin. vii. 15—22.

the god under whose auspices they had fought; the name of the city to which they belonged; and the name of the general under whose direction they had conquered. In reference to this, as it should seem, our Lord says, "I will make them pillars in the house of my God;" yet not such pillars, as, when mouldered and decayed with age, must be taken down and removed; but such as shall be perpetual, and "go no more out." "Moreover," says he, "I will inscribe upon them the name of my God," in token that they belong to him, and that "he is not ashamed to be called their God;" the name also of the city of my God, even of the new Jerusalem, which is modelled by God himself for his own and his people's residence[d], *that* also shall be written upon him, in token that he is a citizen of heaven, born from above, and having heaven for his inheritance: yea, further still, "I will write upon him my own new name also," even my name Jesus, in token that he fought under my banners, and conquered by my strength. In short, the substance of this promise seems to be, that Christ will bestow on his victorious people *the most exalted honour, and never-ending felicity.*]

But every thing which was contained in that promise shall be realized to all "who overcome"—

[They shall be recognized before the assembled universe to be *Sons of God.* Their adoption into God's family, and their participation of his nature, shall be manifest to all. They shall also be proclaimed *Citizens of heaven.* Having been truly heaven-born, their claim to all the immunities of that holy city shall be acknowledged, and their title to all its privileges confessed. They shall then also be declared to have been *one with Christ*, not merely as being Christians, and therefore bearing the name of Christ, but as being one in spirit, one in operation, and one in will and affection. Moreover, to complete their felicity, they shall know none of those changes which take place on earth, no weakness, no weariness, no fears, no conflicts, no intermission of their joy: being once fixed in heaven, "they shall go no more out." What honour! what happiness is this!]

In yet further calling your attention to "what the Spirit saith unto the Churches," we shall particularly ADDRESS,

1. The deceived—

[Many even in the Philadelphian Church "said, that they

[d] Perhaps this is the meaning of those words, "which cometh down out of heaven from my God;" and the allusion is to 1 Chron. xxviii. 12, 19.

they were Jews; and were not; but did lie:" let not any of you then, my Brethren, be hasty in persuading yourselves that you are true Christians. There is a very essential difference between a hope founded on the word of God, and a confidence arising from ignorance and self-conceit: yet it often happens that they who have the least ground for confidence are most pertinacious in maintaining it. But inquire whether you are keeping the word of Christ as well in practice as profession? Are you really making the holy Scriptures the standard by which you try your every sentiment, your every action? Christ "knows your works," and will judge you by them. Your confidence may impose on men, but it cannot deceive your Lord: and, as sure as he is "the Holy One, and the True," he will judge according to truth, and pass his decision according to righteousness; and if he once open to you the gates of hell, none can shut them to prevent your descent into it, or open them again to recal you from it. Come then and "bow yourselves before the Church's feet:" confess that the humble and despised followers of Jesus are the true and only favourites of heaven: unite yourselves to them in an open profession of the Gospel: let nothing tempt you to deny the name of your Lord: but "follow him faithfully in the regeneration, that ye may be partakers of his throne" for evermore.]

2. The discouraged—

[As some think they are strong when they really have no strength at all, so others are ready to suppose themselves wholly destitute of grace, while God himself testifies respecting them that "they have a little strength." But God has never said that he would deliver us from all conflicts here below, or make our arm so strong that we should feel no difficulty in our warfare. This he has assured us of, that "as our day is, so shall our strength be[e]." Let us not then deny what he has already done for us, or doubt what he has engaged to do. If we have no strength at all, whence is it that we have maintained our profession hitherto? And, if we find it difficult to persevere, let the difficulties of our warfare make us cry more earnestly to him, that he may "strengthen us with all might by his Spirit in our inward man." He says to us, "Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown." Here he acknowledges our danger, and guards us against it: but at the same time he intimates, that he is coming quickly both to aid our exertions, and to reward our fidelity. Fight on then, and, "though faint, yet pursue" your enemies, till you have destroyed them utterly. "The grace of Christ should

[e] Deut. xxxiii. 25.

should be sufficient for you," even though you were a thousand times weaker than you are. "Be strong in him, and in the power of his might:" and soon you shall be crowned with victory, and be made everlasting monuments of his power and grace.]

MCCVI.

THE EPISTLE TO LAODICEA.

Rev. iii. 14—22. *And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God: I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eye-salve, that thou mayest see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.*

WHEREVER the leading truths of Christianity are maintained and professed, there may be said to be a Church of Christ. But it is too often found, that the angels or ministers of such Churches go on in the external exercise of their functions, without ever feeling the influence of the truth upon their own souls, or stimulating their people to high and heavenly attainments. Thus it was with the Church at Laodicea: the pastor and the flock had shamefully degenerated from their former experience, and were resting in a state worse than any other of the Churches in Asia, a state wherein their Lord could see nothing to approve, but every thing to condemn. Having occasion

occasion to testify against them in so severe a manner, our Lord declared himself to be "the Amen, the faithful and true witness," and "the beginning" (that is, the efficient Cause, or the Ruler and Governor[a]) "of the creation of God." By this character of himself he guarded against the possibility of their imputing his testimony to mis-representation, since he would testify of nothing which was not true; or of ignorance, since he could not but know infallibly the work of his own hands, which he continually inspected and upheld.

In his epistle to them we notice,

I. The state of the Laodicean Church—

While there was nothing in them that was commendable, they were deserving of the severest reproof on account of,

1. Their lukewarmness—

[They did not openly deride religion as unworthy of their regard, nor did they embrace it with cordiality as the proper object of their affections; but they contented themselves with the mere form, while they were destitute of its power. They possessed just such a measure of goodness as the world approves. The world profess to reverence religion; but they are very fearful lest we should be too much under its influence. They exceedingly dread, what they call, enthusiam. They recommend us to guard against the fervent exercise of religious affections, as much, or even more, than against the indulgence of vice itself. If our hearts be warmed with the love of God, and inflamed with zeal for his honour; if we express a delight in holy meditations and heavenly employments; they are ready to say of us, that "much religion hath made us mad." But how different was our Lord's judgment respecting this matter! The world think it better for us to be without any religion, than to be fully under its guidance: whereas he disregards and despises that religion, which does not call forth into activity all the powers of the soul. In some respects he "would rather that we were even cold" than lukewarm; for, in that state, we are less likely to deceive ourselves, less capable of deceiving others, and less injurious to the honour of his name. Moreover, he declares that such persons are odious and offensive to him in the highest degree; that he cannot endure them; yea, that he will cast them off with the utmost abhorrence. O that they who are such advocates

[a] ἡ ἀρχή.

advocates for, what they call, *moderation*, would reflect on this? We do not mean to plead the cause of *real* enthusiasm: but we affirm, that the world's standard of piety is very different from that by which Christ will estimate our characters in the last day.]

2. Their conceit—

[Self-sufficiency and self-conceit not only consist with a lukewarm state, but necessarily grow out of it: for lukewarmness prevents a close examination of ourselves; and a want of self-examination generates security. Thus the Laodiceans, with all their lukewarmness, "thought themselves rich and increased with goods, and in need of nothing," while they were really in a very "wretched and miserable condition, being altogether poor, and blind, and naked." It is only by engaging heartily in religion, that we find out our defects. We have no conception how destitute we are of every thing that is good, till we come to exercise ourselves in spiritual duties: then we find, that, instead of being rich, we are inexpressibly poor: instead of having a deep insight into the great mystery of godliness, we are awfully blind; and, instead of being duly habited to meet our God, our best "righteousnesses are but as filthy rags," and we have nothing wherewith to cover the nakedness of our souls. But all this is hid from us, while we satisfy ourselves with outward duties, and have no enjoyment of God in them. We feel competent to all which we are *inclined* to perform; and therefore fancy that we possess all the energies necessary for what we *ought* to perform. But this is an error, which confirms and increases our lethargy, and will, if not removed, prove fatal to our eternal interests.]

We are next to turn our attention to,

II. The counsel which our Lord gave them.

He first bids them apply to him for all that they stand in need of—

[Christ is the only fountain and the all-sufficient source of spiritual blessings: and here, in a kind and most affectionate manner, he "counsels" them to come to him for the things which they wanted. He had described the wretchedness and misery of their state in three particulars; and he points them to himself as having an inexhaustible fulness, exactly suited to their necessities. Were they *poor?* Come, says he, for "gold," even for all the gifts and graces of my Spirit, which will stand the severest trial, and will make you "rich towards God." Were they *naked?* Come, says he, for "white raiment," even for the unspotted robe of my righteousness, wherein you shall "be clothed," so that "the shame of your nakedness shall not appear" even to the penetrating eye

eye of God himself. Were they *blind?* Come, says he, to me for that "eye-salve," even for the unction of my Holy Spirit, who shall enlighten your mind, and enable you to "see the wondrous things of my law." It is true, he bids them "buy" these things of him: and it may be asked, How shall one that is so poor *buy* what exceeds the whole world in value? We answer, with the Prophet, "They must buy it *without money, and without price*[b]." They must present nothing to Christ but their sins; and receive his mercies as a free unmerited gift.

This counsel is equally proper for us all: indeed there is no man in the universe but must follow it, if ever he would be happy in a future world. We must look unto Christ, and unto him alone. We must go to him, not for *some* blessings only, but for *all*. We must buy them on *his* terms, and not on our own. And it is only by following this advice, that we can ever be rescued from the miseries we feel, or the judgments we deserve.]

He next urges them to be zealous in repenting and turning to their God—

[His reproof might seem to them an earnest of his wrath: but he assures them, that he gave it rather as a token of his love: "As many as I love," says he, "I rebuke and chasten; be zealous therefore and repent:" by which he intimates, that his reproofs and menaces were to be improved as incitements to those very things which they most of all needed: they were *lukewarm*, and he desired to make them "zealous;" they were full of *self-conceit*, and he wanted to make them "penitent." And, in truth, there must be this thorough change in all of us, before we can attain the salvation of our souls. We must not regard what the world will say; but must be "zealous" and active as the servants of our God. Nor must we regard the suggestions of our own pride and vanity; but must walk humbly before God in the daily exercise of "penitence," and contrition.]

To impress this on our minds, let us consider,

III. The encouraging considerations with which his counsel is enforced—

Wonderful is the grace of our Redeemer displayed in this epistle. Notwithstanding the exceeding sinfulness of their state, he promises to the Laodiceans,

1. That an attention to his voice shall introduce them into the most intimate enjoyment of his presence—

[He

[b] Isai. lv. 1.

[He calls, as well he may, their special attention to this encouraging promise; "Behold," says he, "I stand at the door and knock;" I, the Creator and Governor of the universe, condescend to become a suitor to sinful man; and with incredible patience to solicit admission into his heart, when it is barred against me, and filled with all manner of wickedness. "If, adds he," "any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come into him, and sup with him, and he with me:" I will forget at once all his unkindness, and fill him with all the endearments of my love. What a wonderful condescension is here manifested! Yet is it precisely such as we ourselves shall experience, if we hear his voice and open to him. He is knocking daily at the door of our hearts by his word, his Spirit, his providence: he is using every effort to gain admission into our souls: and, if we were prevailed upon to let him in, what a feast would he bring along with him! He would delight himself in our exercises of faith and love; and he would refresh us with such displays of his beauty, such communications of his grace, such tastes of his love, as should prove to us an antepast of heaven itself. How can we resist such an overture as this?]

2. That the conflicts of time shall be recompensed with the glories of eternity—

[Our blessed Lord himself was once engaged in a warfare with sin and Satan, and knew by painful experience the difficulty of conflicting with them. But when he had completed his conquests over them, he sat down as victor on his Father's throne, to enjoy his triumphs in his Father's presence for evermore. A similar exaltation and joy he proposes even to the lukewarm Laodiceans, if they will but war a good warfare, till they have subdued their spiritual enemies. It is in his power to impart this honour to whomsoever he will; and he engages that to every victorious saint he will give a participation of his throne, as he participates the glory and felicity of his Father's throne. Who then that reflects on this promise, and considers it as spoken by the "Amen, the faithful and true witness;" who, I say will refuse to fight? Who will indulge a lukewarm disposition? Who will not rather be "fervent in spirit, serving the Lord[c]?"]

APPLICATION—

["Hear" then, ye lukewarm Christians, if indeed "ye have an ear to hear;" hear your danger, your duty, your privilege. Surely, while you continue so little influenced by your principles, and so rich in your own conceits, there is no prospect for you but that of being disowned, rejected, and abhorred

[c] Rom. xii. 11.

horred by God. Hear then, while the day of mercy lasts, the calls, the invitations, the promises of your Lord. Attend to his voice: obey his counsel: and expect at his hands the blessings he so freely offers. "It is good to be zealously affected in a good thing." You see the reasonableness and necessity of zeal in things relating to this life: and shall religion be the only thing wherein there is no scope for zeal and earnestness? What can repay you now, like the enjoyment of the Saviour's presence? And what can recompence you hereafter, like a participation of his throne? "Be zealous; be penitent;" be patient: and in due time you shall cease from your labours, and receive that crown of righteousness which fadeth not away.]

MCCVII.

THE BOOK WITH SEVEN SEALS OPENED BY JESUS CHRIST.

Rev. v. 6—10. *And I beheld, and lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth. And he came and took the book out of the right hand of Him that sat upon the throne. And when he had taken the book, the four beasts and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints. And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on earth.*

THE doctrine of the Divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ is that which sheds the brightest lustre over our most holy religion. It is his Deity which alone gives virtue to his sacrifice, and renders it a sufficient propitiation for the sins of the whole world. There are indeed many, who, whilst they profess a regard for Christianity, would rob it of its chief stay and support; and, to effect their object, will mutilate the very Scriptures themselves, and cut out of the Sacred Volume what they find themselves unable to controvert or distort. But, methinks, if we were to grant

grant for a moment that the saints *on earth* may have erred in giving to Jesus the same glory as they give unto the Father, (though their obligation to do so is, in my apprehension, as clear as the sun at noon-day,) have they also erred *in heaven?* Are the glorified saints around the throne of God under a mistake? It is undeniable that they are worshipping the Lord Jesus *precisely as they worship the Father.* Consult the chapter which precedes my text. There we are informed, that "the four beasts (the four living creatures) rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come. And when those beasts give glory and honour and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever, the four and twenty elders fall down before Him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever; and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power; for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are, and were created[a]." No one, I suppose, will doubt, but that in that passage worship is given to Jehovah *the Creator of all things,* and as the one supreme God. Now compare the words of our text, and there you will find *the same persons* (the four beasts and four and twenty elders) *with the very same posture* (that of utter prostration) *in precisely similar language* adoring the Lord Jesus Christ *as their Redeemer*; and all the angels in heaven confirming this act of theirs in terms the most exalted that could possibly be used, and uniting both the Father and the Son in one song of praise, saying, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing: therefore, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power be unto *Him that sitteth upon the throne,* and unto *the Lamb* for ever and ever."

In opening to you this song of the Redeemed, I shall bring before you,

I. The

[a] Rev. iv. 8—11.

I. The occasion of it—

This is particularly adverted to in our text—

[There was "in the hand of him who sat upon the throne a book written both within and without, and sealed with seven seals." To conceive of this book aright, we must bear in mind, that it was a volume, *rolled up*, and consisting of seven parts, each rolled within another, and having a distinct seal affixed to it, so that the contents of one only could be known at a time, the opening of the first making a way for the second, and the second for the third, and so on in succession throughout the whole[b]. But to open the book, and loose the seals thereof, was beyond the power of any created being: there was "not one found worthy of this honour in heaven, or in earth, or under the earth[c]." On this account, the Apostle tells us, "he wept much." He had no doubt but the contents of that book were of infinite importance to the Church and to the world, because it contained a record of God's secret purposes respecting both the one and the other to the end of time; and, it was not from the disappointment of an idle curiosity that he wept, but from an apprehension that God would be less glorified by the concealment of his purposes than by a revelation of them to his Church.

To his great joy, however, One was found, who was "worthy to open this book," even the Lord Jesus Christ, who was here characterized as "The Lion of the tribe of Judah, and as the Root of David." Under the former character, the Messiah had been revealed to Jacob[d]; and under the latter, to David, as David's Lord[e]. But it was under a new character that he prevailed to open the book, even as "a Lamb that had been slain," even as that Lamb of God, that having offered himself a sacrifice for the sins of men, yet bears upon his person the marks of all the cruelties and indignities that he suffered upon the cross. Yet, though bearing these marks of his humiliation, he is represented as "having seven horns, and seven eyes," even all perfection of power and of wisdom also, of which there is none in the whole universe, that does not emanate from him: for from him proceeds the Holy Spirit, in all his diversified influences and operations, "to the utmost ends of the earth[f]."

This glorious Person "went to him that sat upon the throne, and took the book out of his hand," in order to loose the seals thereof, and to open its contents: And immediately the living creatures and the Elders burst forth into the song of praise. What occasion this circumstance afforded them for their song, will

[b] ver. 1. with Ch. vi. 1—12. & viii. 1.
[c] ver. 2, 3.
[d] Gen. xlix. 9, 10.
[e] See Isai. xi. 10. & Ps. cx. 1.
[f] The text.

will be more profitably noticed under a distinct head; after we have considered, as we now proceed to do,]

II. The song itself—

Of the living creatures and the Elders, we are told, that "every one of them had harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints." There is here, beyond a doubt, a reference to the Temple service. In the Temple-worship, harps were used in blessing and praising God[g]: and, "when the Priests went into the sanctuary to burn incense, all the people continued praying without[h]." Thus, these worhippers, being all, as we shall see presently, made priests unto God, they had in their hands censers full of incense, through the odours of which "the prayers of the Saints" ascended up with acceptance before God. Not that the glorified Spirits are Mediators between God and us: no, "there is but one Mediator between God and man, the Man Christ Jesus;" but, as the efficacy of his intercession was typified by the incense offered by the priests, so was it further intimated in this vision, where all were executing, as it were, the priestly office, which in this very song they claimed as pertaining to them.

In the song which they sang, and which was "a *new* song," they celebrated the praises of that adorable Lamb, and gave him thanks for,

1. The *work of* redemption *as wrought out by him*—

[Here all, without exception, to whatever nation or kindred or tongue or people they belonged, traced their reconciliation with God to one common source, the atoning blood of Christ. Not one of them all presumed to claim a share in that glorious work, or to ascribe any part of it to his own strength or goodness: there was but one song amongst them all; all acknowledged equally, that they had once been slaves of sin and Satan; all confessed their obligations to Christ, for interposing for them; all referred to his blood as the price paid for their redemption; and all with one consent joined in saying, "Thou hast redeemed us to God by thy blood."

Greatly were it to be wished that all self-justifying Pharisees would learn of them; and that those who look for acceptance, either in whole or in part, through any works of their own, would fix in their minds what song they will sing, if ever they

[g] 2 Sam. vi. 5. Ps. cxxxvii. 2. [h] Luke i. 9, 10.

they shall be admitted to the realms of bliss. That they will not be able to join with those who are already before the throne, is evident; for not *any* share of the glory do *they* arrogate to themselves; they ascribe it *all* to Him who bought them with his blood: And be it known to you, that not one soul shall ever be joined to that Blessed Assembly, who is not like-minded with them, and has not learned already to give the entire and undivided honour of his salvation to "the Lamb that was slain."]

2. The *benefits of* Redemption *as experienced by themselves*—

[Wonderful was the honour to which they were exalted, all being "kings and priests unto God;" "kings," to exercise dominion over all the enemies of their salvation: and "priests," to offer spiritual sacrifices before him for ever and ever.

To a yet further extension of their privileges also they express themselves as looking forward, when they add, "And we shall reign on the earth." Some have thought, that, in the Millennium, the saints will come down from heaven, and reign on earth a thousand years. But I rather understand the expressions which refer to that period, as importing, not that the departed saints will actually rise from the dead, and reign on earth, but that, so universal will be the reign of piety at that period, that it will appear as if all the departed saints had risen to dwell on earth. This is certain, that the day is coming, when "the saints shall take the kingdom," and piety shall reign as triumphantly on the face of the globe, as hitherto impiety has reigned: and, in the prospect of this, the saints in glory may well rejoice, and consider themselves as participating in the blest event!

And all these benefits, both to themselves and to the world at large, they trace to the death of Christ as the one procuring cause: "Thou wast slain," and hast brought us thereby into this happy state. To the same blessed source also must *we* trace all our privileges, and all our hopes; tasting redeeming love in all, and giving the glory of them all to "the Lamb that was slain."]

But, as it does not at first sight appear how this song could arise from the occasion that called it forth, I shall proceed to mark,

III. The connexion between the two—

Recal to mind what the occasion was. The book which was sealed with seven seals contained all the purposes of God towards his Church and people for ever and ever. And none but the Redeemer himself

was

was found worthy to open it. But, when he took it into his hand with a view to open it, then all the Redeemed burst forth into this song of praise; *expressly founding their acknowledgements on this* as their proper ground. Now this they might well do; because,

1. The events themselves recorded in that book, all arise out of his work of Redemption—

[Had not the Lord Jesus Christ given himself a sacrifice for the sins of men, there would have been no difference between our fallen race and the fallen angels: all having alike transgressed, they would all have paid the penalty of transgression, and been consigned over, the one as well as the other, to irremediable and everlasting misery. But the Lord Jesus Christ having purchased to himself a peculiar people, the purposes of God respecting them are infinitely diversified, every one of them being destined to experience trials and deliverances peculiar to himself, in order to fit him for that precise measure of glory ordained for him from all eternity. Who then should open this book but He from whom it has derived its existence, and to whom all the blessings contained in it must be traced as their proper source?]

2. They will all issue in the felicity of his Redeemed—

[Much indeed is spoken in that book respecting the persecutions of the saints, all of whom are said to come out of great tribulation: and can it be said that *such* dispensations minister to their happiness? I answer, Yes: even in this present life, the trials, to which they are subjected by their enemies, work for their good, inasmuch as they tend to the perfecting of their graces, and lead to a more abundant supply of heavenly consolations. And, in the world to come, the weight of glory assigned to each, is proportioned to what every individual sustained for his Lord, and to the fidelity with which he executed his Lord's commands. The book, like the cloud at the Red Sea, was dark on the one side, even darkness itself; whilst on the other side it was luminous as the noon-day sun: and in both respects it subserved the interests of Israel: so, whether the dispensations contained in that book be dark or light, they shall all tend to the security of the saints, and the completion of the deliverance ordained for them.]

3. They will all reflect glory on him as the Redeemer—

[We may easily conceive of this as far as the mercies are

concerned: but is it true also of the judgments? Can we imagine, that the calamities inflicted on his enemies on earth, and the infinitely heavier judgments executed on them in hell, shall bring glory to the Redeemer? Look into the book of the Revelations, and you will find, that the condemnation of the wicked, no less than the salvation of the righteous, is an occasion of triumph to the hosts of heaven, and calls forth the devoutest acknowledgements and hallelujahs to Almighty God[1] — — —

Here then the acknowledged right of "the Lamb" to open the book, and the acclamations of his Redeemed on seeing him undertake to open it, stand in the closest connexion with each other, and form one great subject, worthy of our devoutest attention.]

This book of the Church's destinies, though opened as to the seals, is yet but very indistinctly seen by any: nor will it be fully known, till the events contained in it are fulfilled.

But,

1. Are there not some amongst us to whom the whole of Revelation is yet "a sealed book?"

[It is to be feared that, notwithstanding all our advantages for knowing the great truths of revelation, they are yet but very imperfectly understood by the generality. Take the work of redemption, and interrogate the great mass of Christians in relation to it, and you will find, that the grossest errors obtain in relation to it. The freeness, the fulness, the excellency of the Gospel salvation are but very imperfectly seen, and very unworthily appreciated. Dear Brethren, if John "wept much," because he could not gain an insight into the book of God's decrees, what reason have many of you to weep, yea, to weep even floods of tears, on account of your ignorance of the Gospel of Christ, of that which "he that runs may read," and of that on which your everlasting salvation depends. Oh, look to the Lamb of God to open it to you; and cease not to weep and pray, till he has revealed to you the glorious mysteries contained in it — — —]

2. Are there not, however, others to whom its blessed truths have been made known?

[Yes, surely, there are not a few, "the eyes of whose understanding have been opened," and who have been enabled to behold "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." Who then amongst you are of that happy number, who can say, "Whereas I was once blind, I now

[1] Rev. xix. 1—4. Recite the whole of this.

I now see?" To you I say, Imitate the hosts above: give glory to your Lord and Saviour: shout forth his praises: sing without ceasing "to him who has redeemed you to God by his blood, and made you kings and priests unto God and the Father." To you also I say, Look to it that you "reign on the earth." You are no longer "the servants either of men" or devils: "being bought with a price, you are his" who bought you, and must do *his* will, and seek *his* glory, even *his only*. None are you to fear, but Him: none to love, in comparison of him: none to serve, but in subordination to him. You are to be training now for heaven, and learning the song of the redeemed whilst yet on earth; that when the harps shall be put into your hands in the realms above, you may not strike the chords as novices, but as those who are well instructed in the heavenly science, and fully prepared to bear your part amongst the celestial choir.]

MCCVIII.

THE WORSHIP OF HEAVEN.

Rev. vii. 9—12. *After this I beheld, and lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; and cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb. And all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders and the four beasts, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God, saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen.*

IN the book of the Revelations of St. John there is more spoken of heaven than in all the Inspired Volume besides. But so greatly are the circumstances diversified, that, though the subject be ever so often brought under our review, it will always be found to wear a different aspect, and to afford fresh matter for profitable consideration. Indeed so important are those different circumstances, that we should suffer great loss, if we did not successively fix our attention upon them as they arise. The passage before us might afford us a just occasion for entering into the subject at large; because we behold here the worship both of the saints and angels: but we

we prefer noticing some particulars which distinguish this individual passage; and for that purpose shall set before you under one head the worship of heaven, and then the instruction to be derived from it.

Let us notice then,

I. The worship of heaven—

We behold it here,

1. As commenced by the glorified saints—

[There was of them "a multitude which no man could number, out of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues." Previous to this period the Gospel had spread throughout all the Roman empire, and more especially if we consider the time spoken of as being after the accession of Constantine to the Imperial throne, and to the Christian faith. The sealing of the hundred and forty-four thousand is supposed to refer to the peaceful state of the Church at that period. Doubtless, during the three first centuries of the Christian era, incalculable numbers of souls had embraced the faith, and been exalted to glory: and those added to all that had been found faithful to their God under the Mosaic dispensation, and to all the Lord's "hidden ones," whether infant or adult, in every nation under heaven from the beginning of the world, must have gradually swelled the number to a multitude countless as the sands upon the sea shore.

These all "stood before the throne clothed with white robes and palms in their hands." Perhaps their robes, as well as the palms, were emblems of triumph: or they might denote their perfect purity, being cleansed from all their guilt in the fountain of Christ's blood, and washed also from all defilement by the sanctifying efficacy of his Spirit. We are told this indeed in the verses immediately following our text: "Who are these that are arrayed in white robes? These are they who have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb[a]." The palms in their hands proclaim them victors in the spiritual warfare. Whilst on earth, they sustained many and arduous conflicts: but they overcame their enemies, and "were more than conquerors through him who loved them."

But do they trace in any respect their salvation either to their own strength or goodness? No, not in any degree: they all without exception ascribe their "salvation to God," as the Great Original, from whose wisdom, and goodness, and power it has proceeded; and "to the Lamb," who purchased it for them through his own most precious blood.

This

[a] ver. 13, 14.

This is their one unvaried song: and they sing it "with a loud voice," as glorying in a salvation so dearly bought, and so freely given.]

2. As continued by the angelic hosts—

[*The situation* of the angelic hosts is worthy of particular attention: they are round about the throne indeed, as well as the Redeemed; but in an exterior circle, and more remote from the common centre; for they are "round about the elders and the four beasts." They, though spotless, have but a creature-righteousness, whilst the Redeemed, though guilty, possessed the righteousness of the Creator himself; and therefore are counted worthy of a nearer access to him, than the angels are able to attain.

Nor is *their attitude* less worthy of remark; for they, though sinless, "fell upon their faces before the throne," accounting no posture too humiliating for creatures however exalted, whilst occupied in the worship of their God.

Unable to join in the song of the Redeemed as applicable to themselves who have never fallen, they yet add their hearty "Amen" to all that the Redeemed have uttered, acknowledging that all possible praise is due to God and to the Lamb for such marvellous displays of their power and grace. At the same time they vie with the saints in all suitable expressions of adoration and love to their beneficent Creator; viewing with exquisite delight all the Divine perfections as visible in the works of creation, and as exhibited with yet brighter splendor in the stupendous mysteries of Redemption. Every term whereby they can evince their gratitude, they accumulate, with an ardour which no words can adequately express; and then add again their "Amen," as concentrating in itself all that with the utmost efforts of their nature they are able to convey.]

Slight as is this view of the heavenly worship, will suffice for the present occasion, if we duly attend to,

II. The instruction to be derived from it—

It will be found well calculated to teach us,

1. Our obligations—

[If we call to mind the faculties with which we are endowed, so far superior to all other creatures, and inferior to the angels alone, we shall see that we also have reason to adore our God for the blessings of our creation, as well as the angels themselves. And for the wonders of Redemption, we are altogether on a par with those who are already before the throne. The same stupendous efforts have been made for

for us, as for them. For us was God's co-equal and co-eternal Son sent into the world, as well as for them. For us He lived, and died, and rose again, as well as for them. To us is salvation offered, as freely as ever it was for them; and for us it shall be alike effectual too, if only we embrace it as they did. The only difference between them and us is, that they are put into possession of that which is kept in reserve for us, against the time ordained of the Father for us to possess it. We have the same aid afforded to us that was effectual for them; and the very instant the work of grace is perfected in us, we shall be summoned to the very place that is now occupied by them, and to all eternity shall unite with them in the same blessed employment of singing praises to God and to the Lamb.

We can conceive somewhat of *their* obligations: let us then in *theirs* view and acknowledge *our own* also.]

2. Our duties—

[The robes of the Redeemed are emblematic of their purity, as the palms in their hands are of the victories which they gained. But how did they attain their purity? By continued applications of the blood and Spirit of Christ to their souls. And how did they gain their victories, but by fighting manfully in the strength of Christ? Behold then how we must be occupied whilst sojourning here below. We must day and night wash in the fountain that was once opened for sin and for uncleanness: our very holiest services, no less than our grossest abominations, must be purged from guilt by the blood of Christ. At the same time we must mortify the whole body of sin by the influence of the Spirit of Christ: the one labour of our life must be to grow up into the Saviour's image, and to "purify ourselves, even as he is pure." But whilst striving after these things we shall have many conflicts to maintain: we have enemies to encounter both without and within: and we must fight manfully against them all; nor ever for a moment relax our efforts, till Satan and all his hosts are for ever "bruised under our feet." It was not by mere inactive *wishes* that any of the saints in glory triumphed, but by warring a good warfare. And in like manner must we also "fight a good fight, and finish our course, and keep the faith" even to the end, if ever we would attain "the crown of righteousness that fadeth not away."]

3. Our encouragements—

[Which among the heavenly hosts did not once feel the same discouragements that we experience? But God in his tender mercy carried on and perfected his work in their souls: and he is equally willing to accomplish in us also all the good pleasure

pleasure of his goodness, if we will look to him, and commit our cause into his gracious hands. He will not leave *us* or forsake *us*, any more than he forsook and abandoned *them*: and "in *our* weakness is he willing to perfect his own strength," as much as he ever did in *theirs*. There is no trial to which *we* can be subjected, that was not experienced by *them* in their day; nor was there any succour afforded to *them*, that shall not be dispensed to *us* also in the hour of need. They in their day envied those who had gone before them, as you do them: and in a little time will others arise to envy you, when your warfare shall be finished, and your blessedness be complete. Remember that "He who sitteth on the throne" is as much interested for *you* as ever as he was for *them*; and that "the Lamb" is as tender over *you* as ever he was over *them*. Only rest on a promise-keeping God, and he will never fail you. He has promised that "none shall pluck you out of his hands;" but that he will preserve you unto his "heavenly kingdom:" and "faithful is He who hath called you; who also will do it."]

MCCIX.

THE REIGN OF CHRIST ON EARTH.

Rev. ix. 15—17. *And the seventh angel sounded: and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever. And the four and twenty elders, which sat before God on their seats, fell upon their faces, and worshipped God, saying, We give thee thanks, O Lord God Almighty, which art, and wast, and art to come; because thou hast taken to thee thy great power, and hast reigned.*

WE read of our blessed Lord weeping over Jerusalem, in the contemplation of the guilt they had contracted by their misimprovement of his mercies, and the heavy judgments which were about to be inflicted on them. And, in truth, wherever we turn our eyes, whether towards the Heathen or the Christian world, we see but too just occasion to weep over their unhappy state. It is almost impossible to behold the universal reign of sin and Satan, and not to participate the feelings of David, when he said, "Rivers of waters run down mine eyes, because men

men keep not thy law[a]." But it will not be always thus. There is a time coming, and, we hope, now near at hand, when the whole world shall be converted to the faith of Christ, and "the knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth, as the waters cover the sea." Of this period the Apostle speaks in my text. Respecting the sounding of the seven angels I forbear to speak, because of the obscurity in which the subject is involved. But of the universal establishment of the Redeemer's empire, and of the joy expressed amongst the heavenly hosts at the prospect of it, I may speak with certainty; because it is a subject so fully opened in the Sacred Writings, that we can entertain no doubt respecting it.

Let me then call your attention to,

I. The approaching reign of Christ on earth—

The kingdoms of this world have hitherto been almost entirely under the dominion of the prince of darkness—

[Satan is called "the god of this world," because he has reduced the world to a state of entire subjection to himself. That wicked fiend beguiled our First Parents in Paradise, and brought under his own tyrannic sway the whole of the human race. The effect produced by him on his vassals may be seen in the first-born child of man; who was a murderer, and slew his own brother solely from an envious hatred of his superior piety. Some few, a little remnant, God has in every age delivered from his dominion; but, from the fall of Adam to the present hour, he has kept in bondage the great mass of mankind, and is therefore justly called "the Prince of the power of the air, the Spirit that now worketh in all the children of disobedience." Not that he has power to make men act contrary to their will. They are possessed of a corrupt nature; and he knows how to take advantage of their evil propensities, and to ensnare them with temptations suited to their corrupt appetites. His wiles and devices are inconceivably subtle: the spirits also that are confederate with him are innumerable: and men are but too willing to comply with his solicitations: so that he takes them in his snares, and "lead them captive at his will." He does not indeed impel every one to the same crimes. Some he instigates to fulfil the desires of the flesh; others to tread more nearly in his own steps, by gratifying the desires of the mind in the indulgence of

[a] Ps. cxix. 136.

of pride, envy, malice, and other hateful passions; which are no less odious in the sight of God, than those lusts which assimilate us rather to the beasts. But, whatever diversity there may be in the outward conduct of mankind, all agree in this, they cast off the yoke of God, and walk after the imagination of their own evil hearts — — —

Such is the state of all the kingdoms of this world, as well of those which enjoy the light of revelation as those that are yet immersed in Pagan darkness.]

But they will in due season "become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ"—

[The Prophets have fully declared this: "The God of heaven will set up a kingdom," which shall not, like the kingdoms of this world, be destroyed, but shall be universal in its extent, and everlasting in its duration[b]. To "the Son of man," the Lord Jesus Christ, shall this be committed; and "all people, nations, and languages shall serve him[c];" "all kings shall fall down before him," and "his enemies shall lick the dust." Not that he will interfere with the exercise of kingly power amongst the different Potentates of the earth: for "his kingdom is not of this world:" the seat of his empire is the heart: and there will he establish his throne; not by the sword of man, but by "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." Of what kind his dominion will be, we may form some judgment from what took place on the day of Pentecost. His word on that day was "quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword," and thousands instantly fell before it. So, when the time shall have come for the full establishment of his kingdom, all opposition, whether of men or devils, shall fall, as Dagon before the ark, and "all nations shall be subdued to the obedience of faith." Then where sin and Satan have hitherto maintained an undisputed sway, the grace of God shall reign, and iniquity from thenceforth shall hide its face — — —]

No sooner was this glorious event announced, than all the hosts of heaven were moved to welcome it. Their thanksgivings will lead me to set before you,

II. The joy expressed in heaven at the prospect of it—

Verily, the reign of Christ is a ground of joy, and may well be made so by all on earth, and by all in heaven. Consider the effect of it,

1. As it respects the honour of God—

[God is banished, if I may so say, from the very world which

[b] Dan. ii. 44. [c] Dan. vii. 13, 14.

which he has made; and the whole of the human race are up in arms against him. His authority is altogether despised. Let any one attempt to impress on men the obedience which they owe to God, how will he be regarded? What will he meet with from every quarter but ridicule and contempt? I speak not of the liberty which by courtesy is allowed to Ministers in the discharge of their public duty, but of expostulations or intreaties in social life: and who is there that knows not how such a liberty would be resented? Nor would it give offence only amongst the profligate and abandoned, but amongst the more moral and decent part of the community: nothing more need be done than to exalt God's law as the rule of our conduct, and his authority as paramount to every other consideration, and it will soon be seen how entirely all subjection to him is cast off, and man is become a god unto himself. The same effect will be produced if we speak of the love and mercy of our God. Let us declare to those around us what God has done for the redemption of a ruined world; let us invite them to believe in Christ, to apply to him for the gift of his Holy Spirit, to live in the continual exercise of prayer and praise; shall we be a whit more acceptable to carnal men, than when calling them to submit to the commands of God? No: the language of their hearts is, There is "no God" to controul us[d]; or, if there be, we will not submit to him: "We know not the Lord, neither will we obey his voice[e]." And as for his Son, whom you represent as sent to gather in the fruits of his inheritance, "let us cast him out," and live in the undisturbed enjoyment of our own hearts' lusts.

Now who that considers this must not blush, and be confounded for the indignities which are cast upon his God? How can we reflect upon it a moment, and not wonder, that the whole earth is not swallowed up again with an universal deluge, or burnt up with fire as Sodom and Gomorrha?

But it is delightful to know, that a period is coming, when "God will take to him his great power and reign," from one end of the earth even to the other. In this contemplation our minds find some relief. Our God shall not always be thus dishonoured: his authority shall one day be universally acknowledged, and his will be universally obeyed. The mysteries of his love also shall be duly appreciated, and all the wonders of his grace be extolled on earth even as they are in heaven. Well might the four and twenty elders, the representatives of the whole body of the redeemed, "fall down and worship God" in the prospect of this time, "saying, We give thee thanks, O Lord God Almighty, because thou hast taken to thee thy great power, and hast reigned."]

2. As

[d] Ps. xiv. 1. [e] Exod. v. 2. Job xxi. 14, 15.

2. As it respects the happiness of man—

[Were we to look only to the *temporal* happiness of man, we shall find it greatly enhanced by the diffusion of true religion in the world. For partly through the calamities to which we are unavoidably exposed, and partly through the evils which men through the influence of their evil passions inflict upon each other, this world is, more or less, to every man, a vale of tears. But religion induces such habits of mind as to dispose us to an universal exercise of love; whilst it affords such consolations as turn afflictions themselves into occasions of joy. In reference to individuals, it may be said, that "instead of the thorn grows up the fir-tree, and instead of the brier grows up the myrtle-tree[f];" and, in reference to communities, that the wolf is made to dwell with the lamb, and the leopard to lie down with the kid; nor will there be any to hurt or to destroy in all God's holy mountain[ff].

Great as the change is in this respect, it is far more glorious in a *spiritual* view. Where is the man who knows any thing of solid peace? He does not exist upon the face of the whole earth, except among the little remnant of God's peculiar people. Many possess what they *call* peace, that is, a mere thoughtlessness and indifference about the eternal world: but who derives joy from the contemplation of death and judgment? Who is "looking for, and hasting unto, the coming of the day of Christ," as the period for the completion and consummation of his bliss? Or who finds a real delight in God as his reconciled God and Father? This is the portion of those only who have believed in Christ. They do possess it: they walk with God as dear children: they maintain sweet fellowship with the Father and the Son: they live as on the borders of eternity, and enjoy already a foretaste of their heavenly inheritance. Of this indeed none can judge, but those who experience it in their souls: there is "a stone given to them with a new name upon it which they alone can read[g]:" but though the stranger intermeddleth not with their joy, it is real, "unspeakable, and glorified."

For the full effect of the reign of Christ we must wait till we come into the *eternal* world. We must be added to the heavenly hosts before we can at all conceive of their bliss: but when exalted to a participation of their lot, we shall feel precisely as they do; and "fall on our faces before the throne of God," to adore him with all the blended emotions of humility and love. Where Christ is not known, the very superstitions of men impose on them such a yoke as makes life itself a burthen: but, wherever

[f] Isai. lvi. 13. [ff] Isai. xi. 6—9. [g] Rev. ii. 17.

wherever he reigns, "the wilderness blossoms as the rose," and earth becomes a nursery for heaven.]

Let me now, in conclusion, ADDRESS myself,

1. To those in whose hearts the kingdom of Christ has been established—

[Mark, I pray you, the conduct of those in heaven. In the prospect of this glorious period, they, not on their own account, but on account of those who should hereafter participate their bliss, *rose from their thrones whereon they were seated,* and all with one accord *fell upon their faces* before God, the very instant that the glad tidings were proclaimed, and burst forth into the devoutest praises and thanksgivings to him on account of the blessings which were about to flow down on man, and the honour which would thereby accrue to God. And will not *you* prostrate yourselves before him; *you* who are so deeply interested in this event, and who have through the sovereign grace of God been already made partakers of the benefit? I charge you, Brethren to cultivate this very spirit. This is what I wish to see in all the religious world: this is the true and proper effect of Redeeming love upon the soul: and I call upon you all to make this improvement of it, and to grow downward in humility, whilst you bring forth fruit upward to the praise and glory of your God.]

2. To those who have never yet bowed to the sceptre of his grace—

[Do you not know that this revolution which is to take place in the world at large, must take place in the heart of every individual; and that, till it is experienced by you, you are subjects and vassals of the Prince of darkness? Know of a surety, that, if ever you would be acknowledged by Christ as his redeemed people, you must be "turned from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God." Yes indeed; you must submit to Christ; you must bow to the sceptre of his grace, or be "broken in pieces as a potter's vessel." Remember what he has said respecting those who reject "his light and easy yoke;" "Bring hither those that were mine enemies, who would not that I should reign over them, and slay them before me." My Dear Brethren, cast away the weapons of your rebellion ere it be too late; and yield a willing obedience to your Saviour now, that you may reign with him in glory for ever and ever.]

MCCX.

HOW SATAN IS TO BE VANQUISHED.

Rev. xii. 11. *And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb.*

THE establishment of Christianity, whether in the world at large, or in the souls of individuals, is, by means of a warfare, carried on between "the god of this world," and the God of heaven and earth. Such is the representation given of it in our text. "There was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, and prevailed not, neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth; and his angels were cast out with him[a]." By this I understand, that whilst our blessed Lord sought, by means of faithful ministers and active saints, to establish his kingdom upon earth, the Devil, through the agency of persecuting Emperors, and idolatrous priests, and heathen philosophers, laboured to the uttermost to counteract this gracious design. During the three first centuries the conflict was severe: but at last the Lord Jesus prevailed, so that Christianity, under Constantine, became at last established through the Roman empire, and idolatry was in a great measure destroyed. "Then was heard in heaven a loud voice, saying, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night: and they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death;" that is, This victory was gained, not by the sword, but by the faith of Believers, the fidelity of Ministers, and the constancy of all.

The words, which we have taken for our consideration belong more particularly to Believers, who maintained

[a] ver. 7—9.

tained their stedfastness, and were useful in the diffusion of the truth, by the simple exercise of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. They were accused before Magistrates continually, through the influence of Satan; but "they overcame their great adversary by the blood of the Lamb."

Let us consider—

I. The character of the adversary with whom we have to contend—

He is called "the Accuser of the Brethren:" and this name justly belongs to him at the present day: for he accuses all the Lord's people,

1. To God himself—

[We are told how repeatedly and how confidently he accused Job[b]: and that, "when Joshua the High Priest stood before the angel of the Lord, Satan stood at his right hand to resist him[c]." To the same effect, in the words immediately before our text, it is said, "He accused the saints before God day and night." How far that wicked fiend may be permitted to prosecute his impious course in the presence of the Most High, we will not undertake to say: but whatever efforts he made in former days, he uses still: and by whatever means he sought to injure the saints of old, he still has recourse to them for the purpose of effecting his murderous designs.]

2. To their fellow-men—

[Here we can speak without hesitation. We see how this deceiver accused God's people of old, to Artaxerxes, to prevent the re-building of the temple[d]; and to Ahasuerus, in order to effect their utter destruction[e]. In like manner he accused the Apostles as ring-leaders of sedition; and even our Lord himself as a blasphemer and a demoniac. And what is there that he does not lay to the charge of the saints at this day? Through him they are still, exactly as they were in the Apostolic age, "a sect that is every where spoken against[f]." Our blessed Lord taught us to expect that men would "speak all manner of evil against his followers falsely for his sake[g]:" and so it is, and so it will be, as long as "the Accuser of the Brethren" retains his influence in the world.]

3. To themselves—

[Few

[b] Job. i. 9, 10. & ii. 4, 5.
[c] Zech. iii. 1, 2.
[d] Ezra iv. 12—16.
[e] Esther iii. 8, 9.
[f] Acts xxviii. 22.
[g] Matt. v. 11.

[Few, if any, of the Lord's people are altogether strangers to the wiles of Satan. Exceeding powerful are the suggestions, whereby he tempts and harasses the souls of men. They are justly compared to "fiery darts," which penetrate the inmost soul, and which nothing but "the shield of faith can quench[h]." Sometimes he insinuates that we have committed the unpardonable sin, the sin against the Holy Ghost; and that we can never be forgiven. At other times he suggests, that we are not of the number of God's elect; and that, consequently, it is in vain to seek his face. At other times, he would make us believe, that we have sinned away our day of grace; and that therefore our state is remediless and hopeless. Now though the world at large are "ignorant of these devices," the Lord's people know them by bitter experience[i]; and find, that, whilst this subtle enemy, by accusing them to others, creates to them many "fightings without," so by accusing them to themselves he generates many "fears within[k]."]

But, formidable as this enemy is, my text informs us,

II. By what means we may be sure to overcome him—

Of the saints in glory we are told, that "they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb:" and we in like manner shall overcome him also, if we regard the blood of the Lamb,

1. As the ground of our hopes—

[It is "the blood of the Lamb" which has procured our reconciliation with God: and if we be sprinkled with it, as the houses of the Israelites were sprinkled with the blood of the Paschal Lamb, no enemy whatever can prevail to hurt us. Thousands may fall beside us, and ten thousands at our right hand, but destruction can never come nigh us. There is in that precious blood a sufficient atonement for the sins of the whole world; so that, if we had the sins of the whole world upon our own souls alone, we need not despair: we need only to plunge into "the fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness," and we shall be pure, even as an angel is pure: "our sins of scarlet or of crimson die shall instantly become as wool, yea, and as white as snow itself." In vain will Satan then attempt to accuse us: for God, who seeth our secret reliance on the blood of Christ, will "behold no iniquity in us:" and in vain will he attempt to distress our minds; for, "being justified by faith in that blood, we shall have peace with God," and peace in our own conscience. That plea, the death of Christ

[h] Eph. vi. 16. [i] 2 Cor. ii. 11. [k] 2 Cor. vii. 5.

Christ for us, will be sufficient to silence every accusation, and to defeat every assault of our great adversary.]

2. As the source of our strength—

[That precious blood has purchased for us all the blessings both of grace and glory; and, relying on it, we may be assured that "our strength shall be according to our day." What is there that God will not do for those who are reconciled to him through the sacrifice of his dear Son? Will he not come down to him, and dwell in him, and be a Father unto him; and deal with him as a Son? But there is one promise which comprehends within it every thing that our hearts can wish: "I will be a God unto him[l]." Consider what is implied in this. If it had been said only, I will be a friend, or a father, unto him, it would have been most encouraging; because it would have secured to us all that might reasonably be expected from persons standing in such relations to us. But, when it is said, "I will be a God unto him," it secures to us the exercise of infinite wisdom, and almighty power, and goodness, and love: and, with these on our side, we may defy all the assault; whether of men or devils.]

3. As a stimulus to our exertions—

[Sweetly encouraging was the testimony given to Abel, when he offered a firstling of his flock to God; insomuch that Cain, who understood its import, was filled with rage at the distinguishing grace shewn to his pious and believing brother[m]. But the blood of Christ sprinkled on our souls "speaks infinitely better things to us[n]." And shall not his love in shedding it for us influence our minds? Shall it not "constrain us to live unto him who died for us and rose again[o]?" What will be able to stop us when impelled by gratitude to him? "Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? No: in all those things we shall be more than conquerors through him that loved us[p]." None of these things will move us: we shall "be ready not only to be bound, but also to die," for our adorable Benefactor; and shall never cease to fight against our adversary till he is overcome, and "bruised under our feet."]

Seeing then that our victory over this great adversary is to be gained by the blood of the Lamb, let us exercise faith in that blood,

1. With simplicity—

[This is the precise idea contained in our text. The Redeemed overcame by a simple reliance on the blood of Christ,

[l] Heb. viii. 10. [m] Gen. iv. 4, 5. [n] Heb. xii. 24.
[o] 2 Cor. v. 14. [p] Rom. viii. 35, 36.

Christ as the only ground of their hopes. And in this we must resemble them. We must not blend any thing else with this. We must not endure the thought of uniting any work of ours in any degree whatever with Christ's meritorious death and passion. We must make Him our only foundation, and glory in him alone———]

2. With boldness—

[It is added, that they overcame Satan by the word of their testimony. No doubt they all testified of Christ whereever they went: and by their testimony they prevailed on thousands to embrace the faith, and to burst the bonds in which they had been held. You are not all, it is true, called to be Ministers of Christ, but you are all to be witnesses for him in the midst of a dark benighted world. With the heart you may believe unto righteousness; but with the mouth you must make confession unto salvation. By this you will give the death-wound to Satan: for let light only shine, and the kingdom of darkness will be utterly destroyed———]

3. With constancy—

[To the honour of the saints in glory it is recorded, that "they loved not their lives unto the death." This is the sure way to conquer. Jesus himself, "by death overcame him that had the power of death, that is, the Devil:" and in the same way must we triumph also. If we would vanquish Satan in the world, or in our own hearts, it must be by shewing that death has no sting for us; and that we can welcome it for Christ's sake. "Be ye then faithful unto death, and Christ will give you the crown of life."———]

MCCXI.

THE FELICITY OF HEAVEN.

Rev. xiv. 1—5. *And I looked, and lo, a Lamb stood on the Mount Sion, and with him an hundred and forty and four thousand, having his Father's name written in their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder: and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps: and they sung as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four beasts, and the elders: and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand which were redeemed from the earth. These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were redeemed from among men, being the first-fruits unto God and the Lamb And in their*

their mouth was found no guile: for they are without fault, before the throne of God.

A CONSIDERABLE part of the Book of Revelation is yet involved in impenetrable obscurity; though we doubt not but that, when the predictions contained in it shall have been fulfilled, the whole will appear as lucid and intelligible as any other prophecies which have been already accomplished. There are parts however which may be understood by every reader; and which are particularly interesting, on account of the sublime views which they unfold to us of the heavenly state. Indeed in the whole of the Inspired Volume there will not be found such bright displays of heaven as in this closing part of the sacred Canon. The veil seems on many occasions to be drawn aside, as it were, and we are admitted to see and hear all that is taking place in the regions of bliss. The passage before us is of this kind. The Apostle himself was, as it were, caught up into the third heavens, where he saw his adorable Lord and Saviour in the midst of all his redeemed people, and heard the songs with which they proclaimed his praise. His record concerning it will lead me to set before you,

I. The blessedness of heaven—

There the Lord Jesus Christ dwells in the midst of his redeemed people—

[Heaven doubtless was the place now opened in vision to the Apostle's view: it was "Mount Sion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem[a]."

There the Lord Jesus Christ dwells, still retaining in his person all those marks which his murderous enemies inflicted on his sacred body, when he offered himself a sacrifice for the sins of a ruined world. He was the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world; and in that sublime character does he yet appear, though seated on his heavenly throne: for in that character he is most glorified in himself, and most endeared to his redeemed people.

Around him stand the myriads of his redeemed. They are called "an hundred and forty and four thousand," every tribe of Israel having twelve thousand of its members "sealed in their foreheads" as God's peculiar property[b], and "having the Father's name engraven there" as an evidence of their relation to

[a] Heb. xii. 22. [b] Rev. vii. 4.

to him. But we are not to suppose that there are no more in heaven than the number specified: for they are in reality a multitude that no man can number, out of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues[c].”]

There are they adoring him with unceasing songs of praise—

[The song in which they join, though not specified here, is made known to us in a former chapter. It is “a new song;” because it was unknown to the bright morning stars which were first created, nor could possibly be sung by those who never fell. Hence it is said to be “a song which no man could learn, except those who had been redeemed from the earth.” Hear the song itself, as reported to us by him who heard it: “They sang a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood, out of every kindred and tongue and people and nation; and hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on earth.” He then adds, “And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels, round about the throne and the beasts and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and blessing[d].” Here are two things to be noticed; one is, that the song was *new*; for it could not be sung till the Lamb was slain; and the other is, that the angels are unable to join in the song of the Redeemed: for whilst the Redeemed celebrate his praises as having been “*slain for them*, and having *redeemed them* to God by his blood,” the angels can only join so far as to acknowledge, that He is “*worthy to receive*” the praises that are so offered to him.

This chorus of the Redeemed, swelled as it is by the acclamations and *amens* of all the angelic hosts[e], is “as the sound of many waters, and loud as thunder itself:” yet is the song so melodious, that every one of the Redeemed accompanies it with his harp; for it is “the voice of harpers harping with their harps.” The music of the temple-service in the days of Solomon must have been grand beyond all that men of this age can conceive: but not Solomon in all his glory could form a conception of that melody which John heard, and which, I pray God, we may be admitted to hear, and join in, to all eternity.

It is said of all this band, that “they follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth.” Whilst they were in this world, they endeavoured to walk in his steps, and to follow him in all his ways;

[c] Rev. vii. 9. [d] Rev. v. 9—12. [e] ib. ver. 13, 14.

ways; and now they attend upon him through the boundless expanse of heaven, all vying, as it were, with each other in testifying their love and gratitude to their adorable Redeemer. As in the days of old, at the time of Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem, "the whole multitude followed him, crying, Hosanna to the Son of David; blessed be he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest[f];" so now in heaven they follow him with similar acclamations, and rest not day nor night from this glorious employment[g].

Such are the circumstances related by the Apostle: but, to form any idea of the bliss enjoyed by the heavenly hosts, we must ourselves be partakers of it: the language of mortality cannot paint it; nor, if an angel were to come from heaven to describe it, could our feeble apprehensions grasp the mighty theme.]

In relation to this blessedness, the point which more particularly demands our attention is,

II. The character of those that are admitted to it—

This is minutely marked,

1. In its source—

["They have been redeemed from among men." Once they were in bondage even as other men: but God in his mercy delivered them "by a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm." Israel when in Egypt were an exact picture of them in their unregenerate state. Their subjection to sin and Satan was entire: nor could they by any means cast off the yoke with which they were bound. But God, in his tender mercy, pitied them; and sent his only dear Son to redeem them; to redeem them, by offering his own soul a ransom for them, and by enabling every one of them for himself to burst his bonds. Thus to God's sovereign love and mercy must their emancipation be traced in the first instance, and then to the efficacy of the Redeemer's blood, and the almighty power of his grace. As Israel were "a nation taken out from the midst of another nation for the praise of the glory of his grace," so are all that either are, or shall be, transferred to the heavenly Canaan, "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people, that they may shew forth the praises of him that hath called them out of darkness into his marvellous light[h]."]

2. In its progress—

["They are a willing people, though made so in the day of God's power[i];" and the very instant that they begin to taste redeeming love, and to experience the mighty working of

[f] Matt. xxi. 9. [g] Rev. iv. 8. [h] 1 Pet. ii. 9. [i] Ps. cx. 3.

of God's power on their souls, they offer themselves up to God "as first-fruits to God and to the Lamb." The first fruits of every thing were God's peculiar portion: nor could any man appropriate them to his own use without being guilty of sacrilege. And such are all who are truly converted unto God[k]. Under this character then they present themselves to him: they know that "they are not their own, but his: and therefore they desire to glorify him with their bodies and their spirits, which are his[l]." They account this "a reasonable service[m];" and they engage in it with their whole hearts.

Having consecrated themselves to God, they endeavour to be faithful to their engagements. This is what is meant, when it is said in my text, "They were not defiled with women; for they are virgins." It is of *spiritual* fornication that the Apostle speaks. This is a common figure in the holy Scriptures. Men are often said to "go a whoring after their idols." But the saints in glory have kept themselves from spiritual, as well as from open and outward, idolatry. They have given up themselves to the Lord Jesus Christ, as a virgin betroths herself to her husband[n]: and they have "kept themselves pure;" not transferring to any rival the regards which are due to God alone.

Nor is it from overt acts only that they have abstained, but from unfaithfulness even of thought or desire. They know that God requires the heart: and that the smallest alienation of the affections from him would excite his just resentment. They have therefore laboured to be sincere and without offence before him: and through the grace and mercy of their God "they have been preserved blameless[o]:" so that "in their mouth there was no guile; and they are found without fault before the throne of God."

Here you see the whole Christian life depicted; and the process by which every saint in glory is fitted for his place. The whole work of grace originates with God, and is carried on by God to its final issue. But man is neither an unwilling nor inactive servant in the house of his God. He is aware that he must be meet for the inheritance of heaven before he can possibly enjoy it. This meetness therefore he aspires after, and labours for with all his might: and, through the operation of God's grace upon his soul, he is fully prepared for glory, being perfected after the Divine image, an Israelite indeed in whom there is no guile.]

Permit me now to ADDRESS you all,

1. As candidates for heaven—

[Men who are candidates for earthly honours find that much

[k] Jam. i. 18. [l] 1 Cor. vi. 20. [m] Rom. xii. 1.
[n] 2 Cor. xi. 2. [o] Jude, ver. 24.

much labour is necessary for the attainment of their object. Be assured then, Brethren, that notwithstanding heaven is a free gift of God for Christ's sake, yet must it be laboured for as much as if it were altogether the fruit of our own exertions: as it is said, "Labour not for the meat that perisheth, but for that which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man will give unto you." And permit me to ask, Is it not worth a whole life of most strenuous exertion? Consider only the representation that has been given of it: is it not desirable to be of that happy number, who are following the Lamb through all the courts of heaven, and with voice and harp ascribing to him all possible glory and praise?

But think of the alternative: think, if you are not admitted there, where will you be, and be to all eternity! There is no middle place between heaven and hell. The idea of purgatory is a mere Popish delusion. As, if you have not the mark of Jehovah's name upon your forehead, you must bear the stamp of Satan's children; so if you are not made partakers of the glories of heaven, you must for ever participate in the miseries of hell. See what is spoken but a few verses after my text. "If any man worship the beast, and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, the same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation: and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: and the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night." Now though this is spoken primarily of those who enter into the abominations of Popery, and bear on their forehead or on their hand the mark of that idolatrous Church, it is true also of all who die in their sins: the persons that are not admitted to the marriage-supper of the Lamb, are "cast out into outer darkness, where is weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth for ever." Compare now these states: both those in heaven and those in hell are "in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb;" but the one, as the monuments of mercy, and joint-heirs of glory; the other, as monuments of vengeance, and heirs of wrath and fiery indignation. Need I then say to you, Be diligent to make your calling and election sure? I pray you, consider how many there are who fall short of this inheritance. Of all that came out of Egypt, two only entered the promised land: and the perishing of all the rest in the Wilderness is set forth as an admonition to you, lest you also come short of the promised rest[p]. I cannot then be too urgent with you on this important subject. I would have you all to succeed in this great enterprize, and so to approve yourselves to your Saviour now,

[p] 1 Cor. x. 1—6. with Heb. iii. 17—19. to iv. 1.

now, that you may be counted worthy to dwell with him in a better world.]

2. As expectants of it—

[Strange it is that every one conceives heaven to be his portion, though he never in the whole course of his life made one effort to obtain it. But, Beloved Brethren, you have already heard the character of those who are in heaven; and that to those only will heaven be assigned. Inquire then whether you have attained this character? What have you experienced of that great work, the work of redemption? Have you been delivered from the yoke of sin and Satan? Have you been brought out from an ungodly world, as the Israelites were from Egypt; and are you living like them under the guidance and government of Jehovah? Does your conscience bear witness for you, that you have presented yourselves to him as the first-fruits, desiring to be wholly and altogether his? When have you so surrendered up yourselves to him? Do not imagine that your dedication to him in baptism, or in any other *public* ordinance, is any evidence of your having *personally* fulfilled this duty, unless you are yet in the habit of renewing that dedication of yourselves to him *in secret* from day to day. And, supposing that you have given yourselves to him, have you been faithful to your engagements, so that in the last day, when the time for your everlasting union with the heavenly Bridegroom shall come, we may "present you as a chaste virgin to Christ?" Have the world and the flesh so far lost their ascendant over you, that you no longer comply with their solicitations, or yield to their temptations? Finally, Can the heart-searching God attest, that, as far as respects any wilful sin, you are blameless and harmless, and shining as lights in the midst of a dark world? These things are indispensably necessary to any well-grounded expectation of the heavenly glory: and if, whilst destitute of these essential marks, you buoy up yourselves with the hopes of heaven, you do but deceive your own souls to your eternal ruin. I even appeal to yourselves: would you who have never touched a harp be able at a moment to accompany with it a band of music, and to join harmoniously in the sublimest strains? How then shall you, if undisciplined and unprepared, accompany the heavenly hosts in all their songs of praise? Their song, as you have before heard, is one which none but the sealed can learn: and were you admitted there in an unconverted state, your harp would yield nothing but discordant sounds, nor would a single note of your voice be in unison with the heavenly choir.

But I would hope and trust, that there are many here who on good grounds are expecting a portion among the saints in light.

light. To such then I would say, "Press forward, forgetting the things which are behind, and reaching forward to that which is before." And, if at any time the thought occur to your mind, Can such a sinner as I be saved, then look into heaven, and see who there are already around the throne: do you not see there a Manasseh, a Mary Magdalen, a dying thief, and a whole host from the Church at Corinth[q]? Then there can be no reason for you, or any other person, to despond. Only seek to be interested in the redemption that Christ has wrought out for you, and every thing else will follow. Through him you shall be justified; through him you shall be sanctified; "through him you shall be presented unto God without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, yea, as holy and without blemish:" for to all who seek acceptance through him, "he is made of God, wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption."]

[q] 1 Cor. vi. 10, 11.

MCCXII.

THE GOSPEL PREACHED TO ALL NATIONS.

Rev. xiv. 6, 7. *I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting Gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and people; saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him: for the hour of his judgment is come.*

ON many occasions we find angels employed by God to execute his purposes respecting men. Sometimes they have been sent as executioners of his judgments; but most generally as dispensers of some special mercy; for their more appropriate office is, as "ministering spirits, to minister unto the heirs of salvation."

In the passage before us an angel is sent, not to an individual, or a family, or a single nation, but to the whole world; having received a commission to "preach the everlasting Gospel to every nation and kindred, and tongue, and people upon the face of the whole earth." His mode of executing this commission also is made known to us; and the whole account will afford us very valuable instruction, whilst we consider,

I. His

I. His commission—

It is here manifestly intimated,

1. That the whole world need to have the Gospel preached to them—

[We are apt to imagine that every man may be saved by the religion which he professes: and to intimate the contrary is deemed a libel even upon the Deity himself. But on this subject we can know nothing except as we are informed by God himself: and we must not set up our opinions in opposition to his revealed will. We must receive with implicit faith the declarations of his word; and whether they accord with our preconceived views or not, we must rest satisfied, that the Judge of all the earth will do right. I am far from saying that God may not save some from amongst all nations, even though they have not a distinct knowledge of the Gospel: for God *may* do whatsoever seemeth him good; and we are no more at liberty to limit the exercise of his mercy, than we are the rights of his justice. But "secret things belong to him; and the things which are revealed belong to us and to our children:" and the uniform testimony of revelation is, that men are all in a lost and perishing condition; that they all need a Saviour; and that "there is no other name given under heaven whereby any man can be saved, but the name of Jesus Christ." This then is the testimony which we must bear, without presuming to be "wise above that which is written." Indeed the very circumstance of an angel being employed to preach the Gospel to the whole world, is itself a proof that the whole world needs to be instructed in it in order to their final salvation; for we cannot suppose that God would use such means, for the information of the world, if the information itself were not greatly needed. We shall do well therefore to fix this as a settled principle in our minds, that as Christ has offered himself "a propitiation for the sins of the whole world," the whole world needs to be directed to him as the only ground of a sinner's hope.]

2. That the office of a Preacher is one which even an angel from heaven may well affect—

[Think you that this angel counted his office an indignity? or that he regretted even his absence from the throne of God, whilst he was occupied in the discharge of it? No surely: a regard for God's honour and for the welfare of mankind would carry him forward with exquisite delight whilst flying through the vast expanse of heaven. And let me say, that the office, by whomsoever discharged, if executed with fidelity and zeal, is as honourable, as any that can be sustained on earth. We justly

justly account it a great honour to be an ambassador from an earthly Monarch, and especially if for the purpose of effecting peace between contending nations. But how infinitely more honourable is it to be an ambassador from the court of heaven, and a representative of the King of kings, to proclaim to a rebellious world the terms on which they shall be restored to his favour, and receive all the benefits which Omnipotence itself can confer upon them! Let none then think lightly of this office; let none imagine that talents of the most distinguished kind can be employed in any service more worthy of them, or that in any line whatever the most strenuous exertions can be more richly recompensed: for if a Preacher be made an instrument of saving only one single soul, he has already gained that which is of more value than the whole world.]

Let us now turn our attention to,

II. His execution of it—

There are many who imagine that the Gospel consists merely in an exhibition of Christ as crucified for the sins of men. That this is the point to which all must lead, I readily acknowledge: but it is necessary that men should be awakened to a sense of their guilt and danger, in order to prepare their minds for a due reception of the Gospel salvation: "The whole need not a physician, but they that are sick:" and, unless people feel their malady, it is in vain to speak to them of a remedy suited to it. The true mode of preaching the Gospel may be learned from the angel, in our text, who first calls men to a state of humiliation on account of sin; then exhorts them to embrace the salvation offered them in the Gospel; and then enforces his exhortation with a consideration calculated to stimulate them to the utmost care and diligence.

1. He calls men to a state of humiliation, on account of sin—

[The whole world are asleep, or rather "dead, in trespasses and sins." All fear of God, yea, all thought of God, is cast off; and men are as unmindful of their accountableness to him as if there were no God in heaven. To awaken them from their slumber, he opens his commission, by saying, and "saying *with a loud voice*," "Fear God." And in like manner would I "lift up my voice like a trumpet," yea, if I could speak,

speak, as the angel himself, like thunder, it would be no more than the occasion calls for, if peradventure I might awaken one single soul to a consideration of his lost estate. I say to you all then, "FEAR GOD;" whatever be your age, whatever your condition, whether ye be old or young, or rich or poor, I say to every one of you individually as well as collectively, "FEAR GOD:" for he is "a great God, and of terrible Majesty;" and ye have all greatly offended him, and are obnoxious to his everlasting displeasure. In the view of this, even a Heathen Monarch issued "a decree that every man in his wide-extended dominions should tremble and fear before the God of heaven[a]." And well may this be inculcated on every human being; for "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." The inculcating of this too is a very essential part of the Gospel: for so was the Gospel ministered by the forerunner of our Lord, and by our Lord himself, and by all his holy Apostles: they all preached "Repentance towards God" as preparatory to "faith in our Lord Jesus Christ[b]:" and he neglects a very essential part of his duty who does not make Repentance a preliminary requisite to a due reception of the Gospel salvation.]

2. He exhorts them to embrace the salvation offered them in the Gospel—

[God has in his tender mercy sent his only dear Son to die for our redemption; and has told us, that through *him* he will be reconciled unto us, and that all who believe in him shall be justified from all things. This Gospel then we should receive with the profoundest reverence, and the most lively gratitude. In so doing we "give glory" to all his glorious perfections. We glorify his *wisdom and goodness*, which have devised such a plan for the salvation of a ruined world: we glorify his *love and mercy*, in accepting it: we glorify his *truth and faithfulness*, in expecting the accomplishment of his promises in the appointed way. It is said of Abraham, that when a child was promised to him in his old age, he "staggered not at the promises of God through unbelief, but was *strong in faith, giving glory to God*." Believe ye then, Brethren, that this way of salvation through a crucified Redeemer is both suited to your wants, and sufficient for your necessities. Believe that, if you "look unto Jesus, you shall be saved;" and that "those who come unto him he will in no wise cast out." Do not dishonour him by any doubts either of his ability or willingness to save you. Do not for a moment assign limits to the mercy of your God, or to the power of Christ, who is "able to save you to the uttermost." If I may use such an expres-

[a] Dan. vi. 25, 26.
[b] Mark i. 4, 14, 15. Luke xxiv. 47. Acts xx. 21.

expression, take God at his word; embrace his promises; rely upon them; plead them in prayer; expect the accomplishment of them to your souls: and, know that sooner shall "heaven and earth pass away, than one jot or one tittle of his word shall fail."]

3. He enforces his exhortation with a consideration calculated to stimulate them to the utmost care and diligence—

[It is probable that there is some reference here to the judgments which will be inflicted on the anti-Christian powers, to make way for the more rapid diffusion of the Gospel. But that will be only a prelude, as it were, to the general judgment, when all the enemies of the Lord and of his Christ shall be finally destroyed. Of that period the Apostles often speak, with a view to detach our minds from present things, and to quicken us in our spiritual course: and so strongly did the Apostle insist upon this thought, that he judged it necessary afterwards to remove from his Thessalonian Converts the erroneous impression, which, by the strength of his own representations, he had made upon their minds. Eighteen centuries have elapsed since that time; and consequently the destined period must be so much nearer its arrival. But, whether it be *in itself* near at hand, or not, it is *as it respects us*; because at the instant of our dissolution all opportunity for repentance or faith is for ever closed. Can you think of this then, Brethren, and delay this necessary work? What would not millions, who are gone into the eternal world, give for one single day to work out their salvation, if by any means it might be obtained? I pray you, lose not the present hour; but "to-day, whilst it is called to-day," humble yourselves before God in dust and ashes, and embrace with all earnestness the salvation he has given you in the Gospel of his Son.]

Let me now yet further IMPROVE the subject,

1. In reference to yourselves—

[You generally acknowledge that the Gospel should be carried to heathen nations. But do not you yourselves need it as much as they? True, you are in some measure acquainted with the scheme of salvation: but to what purpose is it that you have a speculative knowledge of the Gospel, if you have not an experimental acquaintance with it in your souls? Let me then follow in the train of that Divine Messenger, and repeat to you his authoritative admonitions: "Fear God"———"Give glory to him"——— Reflect how soon the hour of his judgment will have come, when all possibility of securing this salvation will be for ever terminated ——— Despise not his message, because it is delivered by a worm

worm like unto yourselves; for the word, however weakly delivered, is God's, and not mine: and therefore I beseech you to "receive it with meekness as an engrafted word, able to save your souls."]

2. In reference to the general subject of Missions—

[What can we need to recommend the office of a Missionary, when we see it executed by an angel from heaven? Suppose he had been commissioned to inquire for an assistant, who amongst us would not have volunteered his services? Or, if he had felt the need of pecuniary aid, who would not gladly have contributed to the utmost of his power? Methinks, the Society now established in our Church, in concurrence with other Societies of a similar nature, is that angel from heaven: and the voice of that Society, like that of Jehovah himself, is, "Who will go for us?" Are there not then many amongst you ready to say, "Here am I; send me?" Would to God I could see such a zeal in the midst of you! Would to God that you were all, like that blessed angel, ready to deny yourselves, and make every sacrifice for the honour of your God! In the early ages of Christianity such a zeal was common; insomuch that the knowledge of Christ was in the space of thirty or forty years diffused through all the Roman empire: but now for these 1700 years how little has been done towards the evangelizing of the world! Alas! not one sixth of the world knows so much as even the name of Christ; and of them, a very, very small portion, it is to be feared, knows him to any good effect. I call upon you then to awake from the supineness in which you have lien, and, by redoubled exertions, to redeem the time that has been lost, and the character of the Church to which you belong. The time for us to work is surely come; and if we enter into the sacred cause with suitable affection, we shall at least have the happiness of sowing what, at a future period, we may expect to produce an abundant harvest.]

MCCXIII.

THE PUNISHMENT OF THE UNGODLY.

Rev. xiv. 9—11. *And the third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, the same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their*

their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever; and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name.

MINISTERS, who wish to discharge their duty conscientiously both to God and man, are placed in a very painful dilemma: if they declare faithfully the whole counsel of God, they are considered as harsh and severe: if, on the contrary, they keep back the more offensive truths, they contract an awful responsibility before God, to whom they must give an account of every soul that has perished through their unfaithfulness. What then are we to do? If the forbearing to alarm the consciences of our auditors would be attended with no evil consequences to them, we might perhaps run the risk of displeasing God ourselves, rather than excite in them any unnecessary disquietude; but when the loss of their souls, and of our own, must infallibly result from such timidity, we feel a necessity laid upon us, and can no longer forbear. Yet, why need we apologize for delivering to men the message which God has sent them? Did not *an angel* deliver it, when first it was announced? and did he not deliver it with *a loud voice*, as feeling its importance, and determined, if possible, to arrest the attention of all the world? Let us then be pardoned for treading in the footsteps of an angel, and for seeking, in the way that he adopted, the welfare of your souls.

In the words before us there are two things which we shall endeavour to point out:

I. Who they are against whom God here denounces his judgments—

All Protestant writers are agreed, that "the beast" here mentioned, and more fully treated of in the preceding chapter, is the Papal Hierarchy. The Romish Church, from the time that it attained a sovereignty over other Churches, has been an *idolatrous*, *superstitious*, *persecuting* power. It has been *idolatrous*, in that it worships saints and images, and the consecrated wafer; and blasphemously ascribes to its supreme head

head the titles and prerogatives of God himself. It is *superstitious*, in that it substitutes penances, and pilgrimages, and other ordinances of man's device, in the place of Christ, our only Advocate and Propitiation. And it is *persecuting*, insomuch that the cruelties exercised by Pagans themselves against the primitive Christians, do not exceed those which she has committed against those who have asserted their Christian liberty, and refused to comply with her abominations. But as, on the one hand, we cannot suppose that *all* the members of that Church shall perish; (for God will discriminate between those who serve him to the best of their knowledge, and those who, with high pretences to piety, are enemies to all that is good;) so, on the other hand, all who drink into the spirit of that Church, or, in the language of our text, "receive the mark of the beast in their forehead or their hand," will certainly be found amongst those who shall endure the judgments here denounced against them. Amongst these therefore we must specify,

1. The adherents of idolatry—

[We do not worship saints or images: true; but are there none who arrogate to themselves an authority in opposition to that of God, or who yield to such authority in points directly contrary to God's commands? What is this, but to usurp, or acknowledge, a power superior to God; or, in the language of the Apostle, "to worship and serve the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for evermore[a]?" We do not mean to magnify every instance of wilfulness into an act of idolatry: but, where it is habitually exercised, or submitted to, in opposition to God's will, there is, in fact, a power elevated above that of God himself: and whether God will resent such usurpation, you yourselves may judge.]

2. The advocates for superstition—

[Superstition is not confined to penances and pilgrimages: it exists wherever there is a substitution made of any human observances in the place of our Redeemer's sacrifice. Some things may be more palpably absurd than others; but whether we seek to establish a righteousness of our own, by counting beads and repeating the Lord's prayer, or by a certain round of religious duties, we equally invalidate the Gospel, and make void

[a] Rom. i. 25.

void the death of Christ[b]. In fact, *this*, more than any thing else, was the ground of separation from the Church of Rome. Much as transubstantiation and the infallibility of the Pope were objected to, it was the doctrine of human *merit* that most of all kindled the zeal of the Reformers, and stimulated them to protest against such fatal errors: and in proportion as we entertain hopes of *meriting* salvation by any works of our own, we return to Popery, and cherish the most damning corruption of "the beast."]

3. The abettors of persecution—

[It is a strange idea entertained by some, that persecution for the Gospel's sake has ceased. But if fires be not now kindled for the extirpation of pretended heretics, is therefore persecution ceased? Are there no such things as "cruel mockings" yet in existence? Yea, where is the person who is at all active in the cause of Christ, that is not despised and hated *on that very account?* Let him possess every qualification that can entitle him to respect, that one fault of loving and serving the Lord Jesus Christ, is sufficient to despoil him of all, and to render him an object of derision. Nor is it to any abhorrence of persecution that we are indebted for the measure of peace that we enjoy, but to the laws, and to the knowledge which men possess on the subject of religious toleration. The same spirit that has "made war with the saints" in the Romish Church, still exists in ours: and inasmuch as it does so, we "bear the image of the beast in our forehead, and are in danger of the judgments which are treasured up for it."]

Having ascertained the characters here spoken of, let us inquire into,

II. Their doom—

Whether the metaphors that are used to describe the punishment of the ungodly are to be understood in any thing like a literal sense, we will not pretend to determine: nor is it of any importance to us to know: for, though there should be no lake of fire and brimstone to torment our bodies, yet will there be torment of some kind or other both to our bodies and souls; and that torment cannot be more fitly represented to us in our present state, than by the images used in our text. We can form some little idea of the internal agony arising from the drinking of a cup composed of burning ingredients; and of the

[b] Gal. v. 2, 4.

the outward agony which we should experience in being burnt alive: and therefore God is pleased to represent his judgments by these images. And, oh! what a terrible idea is that of a cup filled with the wrath and indignation of an incensed God; and that of a lake of fire and brimstone, "kindled to the highest degree of fury by the breath of the Almighty[c]!" But not to dwell on these metaphors, let us descend to those plainer matters which characterize the misery of the damned. It will be,

1. Unalleviated—

[Here, in our deepest troubles, we find something to mitigate our grief, some mixture of sweet in our cup of bitterness. There is some occupation to amuse us, some thought to soothe us, some friend to console us. But in that world of misery, our cup is "without the smallest mixture" of any thing to assuage our anguish; no engagement to draw away our attention; nothing in the retrospect or prospect to afford us the smallest consolation. *Here* we have "mercy and judgment;" *there* we shall have "judgment without mercy." Small as a drop of water would be to one burning in a lake of fire, it cannot there be granted to us[d].]

2. Incessant—

[Whatever our afflictions be, whether of mind, or body, or of both together, the very weakness of our frame procures us some respite; and the overwhelming nature of our troubles leads to an occasional suspension of them. But in the future state of our existence, our bodies and souls will be strengthened on purpose that they may be capable of suffering incessant torture. The unhappy sufferers never close their eyes to sleep; they "rest not day nor night;" they are always "weeping, always wailing, always gnashing their teeth" with inexpressible anguish.]

3. Unpitied—

[The sons and daughters of affliction find in this world some benevolent person ready to compassionate their state at least, if they be not able to relieve their misery. But those who are suffering the wrath of God, though tormented in the "presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb," find no pity whatsoever. Those benevolent spirits, who once would gladly have ministered to them with the tenderest solicitude, now hear their cries, and behold their writhings, without

[c] Isai. xxx. 33. [d] Luke xvi. 24.

out any other emotion than that of acquiescence and perfect approbation. Yea, they themselves are willing instruments of their torture; "gathering them together as tares, and binding them up in bundles, and casting them into the fire[e]." The Lord Jesus too, who once left the bosom of his Father for them, and assumed their nature, and groaned, and wept, and bled for them, and would have accounted all the travail of his soul richly recompensed, if they had but availed themselves of his proffered mercy, even He now beholds them, and, so far from pitying their misery, "laughs at their calamity and mocks now that his judgments are come upon them[f]:" he even finds "rest and comfort to his own soul from the vengeance that he inflicts upon them[g]. And there is reason to believe that every created being, not excepting the dearest relatives of those who perish, will be like-minded with Christ and the holy angels, and will applaud, and even rejoice in, the sentence that shall be executed, whether it be on the ungodly at large, or on their own relations in particular[gg].]

4. Everlasting—

[Whilst here, the troubled look forward to death as the termination of their woes: and men often find satisfaction in the decease of their dearest relatives, from the consideration that they now "rest from their labours." But in that place of torment, they "cry to the rocks and hills to fall upon them, and to cover them from the wrath of the Lamb;" but they cannot obtain this desired end: they wish for death, but it flees from them. Could they but hope that their misery would end at the expiration of millions of years, they would instantly congratulate themselves on their prospects: but the thought of eternity, oh! this fearful thought adds such a poignancy to their anguish, as no finite imagination can at all conceive. Could the fire ever be burnt out, or their powers be consumed by it, they would rejoice: but their punishment is everlasting[h]; "their worm dieth not, and their fire cannot be quenched[i];" on the contrary, "the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever."]

Most of you will anticipate me in the following REFLECTIONS—

1. How astonishing is the supineness of the ungodly!

[Were the cry of fire to be made in a crowded assembly, what pressing would be made to escape the devouring element, and how backward would people be to believe that they were not in danger! But let God, and his Ministers, warn them of eternal

[e] Matt. xiii. 30, 39, 41. [f] Prov. i. 24—26. [g] Ezek. v. 13.
[gg] Rev. xix. 1—6. [h] Matt. xxv. 46. [i] Mark ix. 43—48.

eternal fire, and none will pay the smallest regard to their voice. O sad infatuation! For, "who can stand before his indignation? who can abide in the fierceness of his anger[k]?" "Who amongst us can dwell with the devouring fire? who amongst us can dwell with *everlasting* burnings[l]?" May God awaken all of us from our security; and so lead us to examine our real character, that we may humble ourselves before him, and "flee from the wrath to come!"]

2. How happy are they who have the mark of God's image upon them!

[Blessed be God! there are many whose dispositions and habits are altogether changed; who were once idolatrous, and superstitious, yea, perhaps contemners and persecutors of real godliness, but are now enlightened by the Holy Spirit, and "renewed after the image of God in righteousness and true holiness." You also are "marked in your foreheads[m];" but "your spot is the spot of God's children[n]." Blessed indeed are ye; for "ye shall be counted worthy to escape all those things which are coming on the ungodly, and to stand before the Son of man" in his glory. For you is prepared a very different cup, a cup "wherein is fulness of joy, and pleasures at God's right hand for evermore[o]." Yes, whilst "fornicators, liars, hypocrites," and sinners of every description "shall have their portion in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone[p]," you shall dwell in the presence of your God, and enjoy an inconceivable happiness without mixture, intermission, or end.]

[k] Nahum i. 6. [l] Isai. xxxiii. 14. [m] Ezek. ix. 4.
[n] Deut. xxxii. 5. [o] Ps. xvi. 11. [p] Rev. xxi. 8. with Ps. ix. 17.

MCCXIV.

THE SONG OF MOSES AND THE LAMB.

Rev. xv. 3, 4. *And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of Saints. Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name?*

THE reign of Antichrist, and his ultimate destruction, occupy a large portion of the Revelation of St. John. His destruction has been foretold in the chapter which precedes my text; and is more circumstantially declared in that which follows it. In the

the chapter before us, we have an introductory vision, representing the joy and triumph which the glorified saints would express on that occasion. But respecting the particular circumstances of the vision, Commentators are by no means agreed. Where this is the case, I would by no means presume to speak with confidence, especially where I am under the necessity of differing from those which are most generally, and most justly, approved. But it appears to me, that too little attention has been paid to the context; and that, if the parallel, which is evidently drawn between the deliverance at the Red Sea and our redemption by Christ, be taken as a clue, the whole will be unravelled, and simplicity itself will pervade that, which, with any other interpretation, will present nothing to our view but inexplicable obscurity.

"A sea of glass" is mentioned before, in the fourth chapter[a]; where it is supposed to refer to the brazen sea which was in the Temple, and which was filled with water for the service of the Priests[b]. But we are not on that account *limited* to that view of it in this place. It is well known, that the same images are used in reference to different things, especially in this highly figurative Book: and the reference must always be determined by the context. Now consider, What is the subject that is here spoken of? It is the destruction of all the enemies of God and of his Christ. And what is *the illustration* given of it? It is taken from the destruction of Pharaoh and the Egyptian hosts in the Red Sea. And what are *the terms in which this deliverance is celebrated?* They precisely accord with those which were used by Moses and the Israelites on that occasion; as we shall more distinctly point out in our further view of the subject. Now take this clue, and the whole vision will be extremely clear, and perfectly harmonious in all its parts, without any occasion for fanciful conjectures. We will paraphrase the whole in conformity with this idea.

"I saw,

[a] Ch. iv. 6. [b] 1 Kin. vii. 23—26.

"I saw, as it were, a sea," where "the saints had got the victory" over their persecuting and blood-thirsty enemies: and it was, "as it were, a sea of glass mingled with fire:" the waters, having overwhelmed all God's enemies, were now calm, and clear as crystal itself, whilst the corruscations of light emanating from the pillar of fire, and shining with the brightest possible effulgence, made the whole sea appear as if it were mingled with fire[c]. And I saw the victorious saints "standing (close) upon it[d]." And I heard them "sing a song to the Lamb" of God, precisely similar to that which was sung by Moses and the Israelites at the Red Sea, adoring "their God and King" as the sole author of their deliverance, and prophetically declaring, that he shall in due time "reign over all nations for ever and ever[e]."

This song we now proceed to consider. The former part of it consists of retrospective adoration; and the latter part, of prospective exultation and triumph.

Let us notice what is spoken by them in a way,

I. Of retrospective adoration—

Filled with the profoundest gratitude, they celebrate,

1. The deliverance they have experienced—

[Great was the deliverance vouchsafed to Israel; as Moses said, "In the greatness of thine excellency thou hast overthrown them that rose up against thee: thou sentest forth thy wrath, which consumed them as stubble[f]." But beyond all comparison greater is that deliverance which the saints experience from the enemies of their salvation: and, when their triumphs are complete, they will have proportionably greater reason to sing, "Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty!" Dreadful have been the sufferings which mul-

[c] This is a common appearance of water reflecting the rays of the rising or setting sun.

[d] The not adverting to *this* sense of the word ἐπὶ *(apud, prope, juxta:* see Schleusner,) seems to have been the occasion of most of the strange explanations given of the whole passage.

[e] Compare ver. 2—4. with Exod. xv. 1, 6, 18.

[f] Exod. xv. 7.

multitudes have endured from the Antichristian powers. But it is not from a mere human foe that they have been rescued, but from the Great Dragon, that Old Serpent, the Devil, and from all his hosts. Nor is it from a mere temporal death that they have escaped, but from everlasting death in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone. Nor is it by a mere exercise of power that this deliverance has been effected for them, but by the incarnation and death of God's co-equal, co-eternal Son: from whence it is that they sing, "Great and marvellous are thy works, *Lord God Almighty*;" "just and true are thy ways, Thou King of Saints:" for, *as Jehovah, the Redeemer of Israel*, was their King, and took them under his own immediate government, *so is* "*the Lord God Almighty* our King, even "*the King of all the saints*," that ever have been or ever shall be saved. It is "the Mighty God," who, by the wonders he has wrought for us, is become "the Prince of Peace[g]."]

2. The perfections of God displayed in it—

[Most cruel had been the conduct of Pharaoh towards the Children of Israel: and God had repeatedly declared both to him and to Israel themselves, that he would deliver them out of his hands. When therefore Pharaoh, with all his host, was destroyed in the Red Sea, Moses particularly noticed the correspondence between his impiety and the judgments inflicted on him: "The enemy said, I will pursue; I will overtake; I will divide the spoil; my soul shall be satisfied upon them: I will draw my sword; my hand shall destroy.—Thou didst blow with thy wind, the sea covered them: they sank as lead in the mighty waters[h]." But view the perfections of God in the work of redemption. Verily, "God knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished[i]." Or, take a more comprehensive view of it: see Justice, not merely as honoured by the atonement made for sin, but as demanding salvation, if I may so speak, for those for whom it was offered; demanding it, as due to him who made that atonement, and as due to those who trust in it for their acceptance before God. See Truth also fulfilling all the promises of God to his believing people, and making the very rage of their enemies the occasion of displaying more abundantly in their behalf his power and grace. Not even Mercy itself will appear more glorious to the redeemed soul in heaven, than will these *once hostile* perfections of justice and truth: for whilst the saint was in his unconverted state, these were the perfections which most loudly called for the judgments of God upon him; but, on his believing in Christ, they instantly became his advocates, and from thenceforth will remain through eternal ages his greatest

[g] Isai. ix. 6. [h] Exod. xv. 9, 10. [i] 2 Pet. ii. 9.

greatest security. As the Lord Jesus is "faithful and just to forgive him his sins," so will he be in confirming to him that forgiveness for ever and ever.

Here I must particularly call your attention to the correspondence between the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb. Moses sang, "Who is like unto thee, O God, among the gods? Who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders[k]?" So, in the words following my text, God's holiness is acknowledged; "Thou only art holy;" whilst, in my text itself, all the other perfections of the Deity are magnified and adored.]

The song of the Redeemed proceeds yet farther in strains,

II. Of prospective exultation and triumph—

How forcible is the appeal which they make to the whole universe!

[It is particularly said of the Israelites on that occasion, that "when they saw that great work which the Lord did upon the Egyptians, the people feared the Lord, and believed the Lord and his servant Moses[l]." And certainly we cannot suppose, that there was so much as one among them that was not deeply impressed with the mercy vouchsafed unto him. And shall there be found one amongst those who profess to have been redeemed by Christ, "who will not fear him, and glorify his name?" It is said of the Converts in the Millennial age, that "they shall fear the Lord and his goodness in the latter days[m]." And indeed it is impossible to contemplate this goodness, and not desire to give up ourselves entirely to him. Such a surrender of ourselves to him must appear to all "a reasonable service[n]." Having been "bought with such a price," even "with the precious blood of that spotless Lamb[o]," what can we think of for a moment, but to glorify him with our bodies and our spirits which are his[p]?"

And have we not abundant encouragement to do so? Look at the Israelites at the Red Sea. How many of them perished in the sea? Not one. And how many of their enemies escaped destruction? Not one; "The waters covered them; *there was not one of them left*[q]." And shall it not be so with those who commit themselves to the guidance of the Lamb? Will not HE also "make the depths of the sea a way for the ransomed

[k] Exod. xv. 11.

[l] Exod. xiv. 31. N.B. This is the chapter appointed to be read on *Easter Even*, which marks the suitableness of the subject to that day.

[m] Hos. iii. 5. [n] Rom. xii. 1. [o] 1 Pet. i. 18, 19.

[p] 2 Cor. vi. 20. [q] Ps. cvi. 11.

somed to pass over[r]?" Yes, "they shall go over *dry-shod*[s]:" As the Hebrew Youths in the furnace "had not so much as the smell of fire pass upon them," so shall the whole body of the Redeemed escape from their trials without even the shadow of an injury sustained by them. We cannot conceive a greater disparity than between Pharaoh with his "six hundred chariots of war," and the unarmed hosts of Israel with a million of women and children to protect: but God was on their side: and God is on our side too: and "it is not his will that one of his little ones should perish[t]." It matters not how numerous or potent our enemies may be: let us only fear "the King of saints," and confide in him; and we shall soon "behold them all dead upon the sea-shore[u]."]

What the Redeemed in their song inculcate as so reasonable, they look forward to as certainly to be accomplished in due season throughout the whole earth—

[This is very particularly insisted on in the song of Moses: "The people shall hear and be afraid: sorrow shall take hold on the inhabitants of Palestina. Then the dukes of Edom shall be amazed: the mighty men of Moab, trembling, shall take hold upon them: all the inhabitants of Canaan shall melt away. Fear and dread shall fall on them: and the Lord shall reign for ever and ever[x]." So shall our adorable Redeemer be feared throughout the whole earth, as it is said in the words following my text, "All nations shall come and worship before thee; for thy judgments[y] (thy saving truths) are made manifest." The obligation to fear and glorify our blessed Lord is becoming more extensively known: and the time is not far distant now when it shall be universally known and universally acknowledged. The wonderful works that he has wrought shall not be heard so partially and with such indifference as they now are: the glad tidings of Redemption shall be carried to the utmost ends of the earth, and "all flesh shall see the salvation of God:" "All kings shall fall down before him; all nations shall serve him." Blessed prospect! worthy to be celebrated by the heavenly hosts! and worthy of the incessant attention of every Child of man!]

And now let me ASK, Who will not fear and glorify our redeeming God?

[Are any of you who are here present prepared to say, that he does not deserve this tribute at your hands? What would

[r] Isai. li. 10. [s] Isai. xi. 15. [t] Matt. xviii. 14.
[u] Exod. xiv. 30. [x] Exod. xv. 14—18. [y] δικαιώματα.

would you have thought of an Israelite who should have made such an assertion at the Red Sea? And, if you would have condemned him as a graceless and ungrateful wretch, what must you think of yourselves, who have experienced such infinitely richer mercy at his hands? O come; come and stand upon this sea of glass: behold its waves all calmed and smooth as crystal itself: see the coruscations of the cloud, and the impress of the Deity himself upon it: reflect on what has been wrought for you. Ponder the height and depth and length and breadth of the incomprehensible love contained in it: take your harps: tune them to the songs of the Redeemed above: begin the song of Moses and the Lamb: join, with however feeble notes, the choir above: and look forward to the day when you shall strike your harps even as they do; and your notes shall be heard as loud and as melodious as any of theirs. O blessed day! "Look for it: hasten to it." It is but a little time longer, that you have to contend with principalities and powers. Your victory over them is sure; and shall speedily be consummated. Your enemies are following you indeed, as Pharaoh did, saying, "I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil: my lust shall be satisfied upon them; I will draw my sword; my hand shall destroy them." But, in a little moment, "God will blow with his wind; and the sea shall cover them: and they shall sink as lead in the mighty waters[s]." To the weakest amongst you all, is this consolatory message sent: "Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right-hand of my righteousness. Behold, all they that were incensed against thee shall be ashamed and confounded: they shall be as nothing: and they that strive with thee shall perish. Thou shalt seek them, and shalt not find them, even them that contended with thee: they that war against thee shall be as nothing, and as a thing of nought[t]." May this glorious consummation speedily be accomplished! Even so, Amen, and Amen!]

[s] Exod. xv. 9, 10. [t] Isai. xli. 10—12.

MCCXV.

THE TESTIMONY OF JESUS.

Rev. xix. 10. *The testimony of Jesus is the Spirit of prophecy.*

GOD is known by the works which he has made; on every one of which there is an impress of Omnipotence.

tence. Nor is his agency less visible in the suspension of the laws of nature (as they are called), than in the formation of them. Hence the miracles wrought by our blessed Lord were always appealed to as undeniable attestations to his character, and decisive evidences of his Divine Mission. There is yet a third mark of a Divine interposition, which is not at all inferior to either of the former; I mean the accomplishment of prophecy. In some respects this species of proof seems superior to the others, because its weight is continually increasing; whilst that of creation is stationary; and that arising from miracles loses half its force, as soon as the spectators of those miracles are taken from us. On this account, perhaps, it is called, "a *more sure* word of prophecy." Certain it is, that God rests on this his exclusive claim to Divine honour; and challenges the gods of the Heathen to evince their title to Divinity by one single proof of their prescience[a].

From this conviction, St. John fell at the feet of the angel who had revealed so many things to him, and began to render him that worship which was due from a creature to his Creator. But the angel undeceived him; and forbad him to execute his purpose; because he was only the servant and messenger of Jehovah, to whom alone such honour was due. "I am thy fellow-servant," says he: "Worship God; for the testimony of Jesus," which you have so copiously heard from me, is not mine, but is sent to thee by the Spirit of prophecy," that is, by the Spirit of God, from whom alone all prophetic knowledge proceeds: He therefore, and He alone, is to receive any such tribute at thy hands.

This appears to be the scope and meaning of the words before us: in our further explanation of which we shall shew,

I. That to testify of Jesus is the great end of all prophecy—

The

[a] Isai. xli. 23.

The lines of prophecy are indeed exceeding various; yet do they all meet in one common centre, the Lord Jesus Christ[b]. In some view or other, the application of prophecy to him will always be found just: it may respect him more immediately or more remotely; but *Him* it always does respect; and it presents us with a clear compendious view of,

1. His nature and character—

[It represents him as "Emmanuel, God with us," even "the mighty God:" and at the same time informs us that he should be "a child born, a son given;" and that being born of a pure virgin, he should be "a man, Jehovah's fellow."

Such does it represent his *nature* to be, perfect God and perfect man; and his *character* it describes in all its parts. He was to be infinitely *holy*, "loving righteousness, and hating iniquity." His *wisdom* also was to be infinite; for he was to have "a spirit of wisdom and understanding, of counsel and of might, of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord; and was to be quick of understanding in the fear of the Lord." He was to be *meek and lowly*, so as "not to break a bruised reed or quench the smoking flax;" and *tenderly compassionate*, "carrying the lambs in his bosom, and gently leading them that were with young." He was to be invincibly *patient* also, being, like "a lamb led to the slaughter, or sheep before her shearers, dumb:" he gave his back to the smiters, and his cheeks to them that plucked off the hair. In short, he was to be "*fairer than ten thousand*, and altogether lovely."]

2. His work and offices—

[He was to be the "ever-living Redeemer," who should "give redemption to his people," and by the blood of his covanant should bring up his prisoners out of the pit wherein there is no water." In order to execute this work, he was to be "*a Prophet* like unto Moses," who should "give light to the Gentiles" as Moses had done to the Jews, and "whose instructions the whole world at the peril of their souls must hear." He was also, as *a Priest*, to make, not beasts, but "his own soul, an offering for sin;" "to have our iniquities laid on him;" to be himself "wounded for our trangressions and bruised for our iniquities;" yea, "to be cut off, but not for himself;" and thus to "make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in an everlasting righteousness." He was also to "make intercession for transgressors;" and by presenting himself before the mercy-seat as "the Lord our Righteousness," he was entirely to "make an end of sin," so that "in him all the seed of Israel

[b] John i. 45. & Acts x. 42, 43. & John v. 39.

Israel might be justified and might glory." He was also, as *a King*, to be "set on God's holy hill of Zion;" and to be enthroned "at God's right hand, till all his enemies should be made his footstool." Whatever had before reduced his people to "captivity, he was to lead captive," and to reign over "a people rendered willing and obedient in the day of his power."]

3. His kingdom and glory—

[The rise and fall of other kingdoms are often the subjects of prophecy, but it is only because of their relation to the kingdom of Christ. The smallest things that relate to that are deemed of sufficient importance to occupy a very large space in the Sacred Writings, whilst the numberless events which appear great in our eyes are passed over without the least notice. But the truth is, that "Christ is all, and in all:" His kingdom alone is regarded by God; and nothing has any real importance but in proportion to the connexion which it has with that. The empires of Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome are mentioned as successively to flourish for an appointed season; but that of Christ was afterwards to be established on the ruins of them all, and "to stand for ever:" "to Him should be given dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages should serve him: His dominion is to be an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom that which shall not be destroyed."

What we read of respecting the destruction of Antichrist and all his adherents, is all with a view to the ultimate enlargement and universal establishment of the Messiah's empire, that "He may be King over all the earth, and that there may be one Lord, and his name one."]

Now these prophecies have been delivered in a variety of ways; but it is certain,

II. That that testimony, by whomsoever delivered, proceeds only from the Spirit of God—

The angel who instructed John, told him, that the testimony which he had given of Jesus proceeded from "the Spirit of Prophecy." This is universally true. From him proceeds,

1. The revelation of it to the world—

[What was the substance of the Prophetic declarations, St. Peter tells us; "The Prophets testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow." By whose agency also they were made known, he tells us;—it was

was "the Spirit of Christ:" and so far were the Prophets from being the authors of their own report, that they were forced "to inquire and search diligently what the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify." In another place, he extends this observation to all the Prophets from the beginning of the world: "Prophecy came not in old time by the will of man, but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." Of the whole Sacred Volume also St. Paul affirms the same: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God."

What the motives were which induced God thus to reveal his purposes to men, we are at no loss to declare. He did it, first, to prepare the world for the reception of the Messiah; next, to point out that Messiah when he was come, so that no possibility of doubt could exist respecting him; and, lastly, to make us know infallibly, that all which he has revealed respecting the ultimate state of the righteous and the wicked shall surely be fulfilled in its season.]

2. The manifestation of it to the souls of men—

[Man can no more apply the prophecies with power to his own soul, than he could have suggested them from his own mind. He must have a spiritual discernment given him before he can know the things of the Spirit[c]. Could the prophecies alone have enlightened the mind of man, St. Paul, who was so conversant with them, would have been convinced by them. But he knew not Christ, till "it pleased God to reveal his Son *in* him," and "to open his understanding to understand the Scriptures:" thus also was "the testimony of Christ confirmed by the Holy S[illegible] it in" the Christians at Corinth[d]. And in like manner the Holy Spirit still "testifies of Christ[e];" yea, it is his office to do so, even to "glorify Christ, by taking of the things of Christ, and shewing them unto us." Without his agency, the external publication of the Gospel would have no effect: "Paul might plant, and Apollos water, to no purpose, unless God interposed to give the increase."]

We may LEARN then from this subject,

1. *With what view* we should study the Scriptures—

[If the end of them all be to testify of Christ, then must we search them, in order to obtain or grow in the knowledge of Christ. It is of no use to amuse ourselves with studying the prophecies, unless we be led by them to believe in Christ, to put our trust in him as the only Saviour of the world, and to commit all our concerns to His wise and gracious disposal. All that has been accomplished, or is now accomplishing, or yet

[c] 1 Cor. ii. 11, 12, 14. [d] ib. ver. 5, 6. [e] John xv. 26.

yet remains to be accomplished, must lead us to realize the thought of his superintending providence, and convince us that not one jot or tittle that he has spoken shall ever fail. Eternity shall give an infallible exposition of all that has been revealed, and every soul of man attest its truth.]

2. *In what manner* we should study them—

[We should study them not as the word of man, but as the word of God; we should study them with humble fervent prayer; we should beg that God would "open our eyes to see the wondrous things of his law," and "give us *the spirit of wisdom and revelation* in the knowledge of Christ." If we lean to our own understandings, we shall err: but if we seek the teaching of God's Spirit, "he will give us the anointing of the Holy One, that shall teach us all things;" he will shine into our hearts "to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." "The meek he will guide in judgment, the meek he will teach his way."]

3. To whom we should give the glory, if we be savingly instructed by them—

[We cannot take it to ourselves, for "no man can say that Jesus is the Christ, but by the Holy Ghost." Nor are we to give it to the instrument, whether he be man or angel; for he is but an instrument, a servant of the living God. He may be, he ought to be, "esteemed very highly in honour for his work's sake;" but we must never rob God of his glory to give it to a creature. Is any of you disposed to idolize the creature? "See thou do it not." "Worship God," and God only: for the testimony which you have received concerning Jesus Christ is not our testimony, but God's: "the Spirit of prophecy" revealed it, and the "Spirit of prophecy" applied it to your hearts and consciences: to him therefore be ascribed exclusively, and at all times, the praise, the honour, and the glory for evermore.]

MCCXVI.

CHRIST THE KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

Rev. xix. 16. *He hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written,* KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

OF all the Apostles none seem to have been so highly favoured as John. While yet Jesus was on earth, John was characterized above all others as the Disciple whom Jesus loved: and, after his exaltation to heaven, John was preserved in the world many

many years longer than any other Apostle, and was honoured with a multitude of visions declarative of the state of the Church to the remotest period of time. The vision contained in the context oretels the destruction of Antichrist in the latter days, and the consequent establishment of Christ's kingdom upon earth. The person riding upon a white horse as a Mighty Conqueror, is the Lord Jesus Christ himself; who is before described as having "eyes like a flame of fire," and "a sharp sword going forth out of his mouth[a];" who is beyond all doubt "The word of God[b]," and whose name is truly "Wonderful;" being incomprehensible to any except himself and his eternal Father[c]. In noticing that part of the description which is contained in the text, there are two things to be considered:

I. The name by which he is called—

The august title which is here given to Christ denotes,

1. His universal dominion—

[The kings and lords of this world have only a limited sway: they rule over a certain tract of country and a certain portion of mankind, but they are independent of each other. But Jesus Christ rules over *them:* they are all his vassals, and more entirely subject to his will than the meanest of their servants are to theirs. There is not a principality or power in earth, or heaven, or hell, that is not altogether dependent upon him. He has "a name given him that is above every name[d];" "he is Heir and Lord of all[e];" "and he doth according to his will in the armies of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; nor can any stay his hand or say unto him, What doest thou[f]?"

It is true that there are many who are enemies to him, and rebels against his authority: but though they think to break his bands asunder and cast away his cords from them, he "has his hook in their nose and his bridle in their jaws," and says to them, as he does to the sea, "Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further." They all unwittingly fulfil his will, even while they labour most to counteract it: and, when they seem

[a] Compare ver. 12, 15. with Rev. i. 14, 16.
[b] Compare ver. 13 with John i. 1, 14.
[c] Compare ver. 12. with Isai. ix. 6. & Matt. xi. 27.
[d] Phil. ii. 9—11. [e] Heb. i. 2. Rom. x. 36. [f] Dan. iv. 35.

seem most to prevail against him, they accomplish only his secret purposes[g].]

2. His proper Godhead—

[The name here given to Christ is that which belongs to the one supreme God[h], and to him alone[i] — — — And well may it be given to him, since there is not any other name of the Deity which he does not bear[k] — — — Nor any attribute which he does not possess[l] — — — Nor any honour peculiar to the Deity, which he does not receive[m] — — — We may be assured therefore that Jesus is not a mere subordinate King, but "God over all, blessed for evermore[n]."]

While the text proclaims his name, it leads us very particularly to notice,

II. The manner in which it is manifested—

Whether the inscription of his name upon "his *vesture*" refer to any custom of that nature that obtained among great men or conquerors, we cannot say: but the inscription of it upon "his thigh" must certainly mean that his name was written upon his sword, which hung upon his thigh[nn]. Of the general import of the passage we have no doubt: his "vesture dipped in blood," denoted his *past* victories[o], and his sword hanging upon his thigh, denoted his state of preparation for *future* triumphs; the inscription therefore altogether means,

1. That he has manifested his power in his past victories—

[Jesus has already given abundant proofs of his almighty power and universal dominion. Look at Pharaoh and his hosts; how vain was their opposition to him; how signal and complete their ruin! Behold the Seven Nations of Canaan; how they melted before him as snow before the meridian sun! See his once highly favoured people the Jews; how he has verified

[g] Exod. ix. 16. Isai. x. 5—7, 15. His dominion over *his Church* in particular, might also be here opened, together with the manner in which he protects his people, and reigns in all their hearts. Eph. i. 20—23.

[h] Deut. x. 17. [i] 1 Tim. vi. 15, 16.

[k] Isai. xl. 3. with Mark i. 1—3. *The mighty God.* Isai. ix. 6.

[l] *Eternity*, Mic. v. 2. *Omnipresence*, Matt. xxviii. 20. *Omniscience*, John xxi. 17. *Omnipotence*, Matt. xxviii. 18.

[m] Acts vii. 59. John xiv. 1. John v. 23. [n] Rom. ix. 5.

[nn] Ps. xlv. 3. [o] Isai. lxiii. 1—4.

verified his word towards them, "wiping Jerusalem as a dish, and turning it upside down[oo]." Look at all his enemies in every age; Have they prevailed? Is not His cause still triumphant? and have not multitudes of his enemies already been made his footstool? Yes, not Julian only (the Apostate), but thousands and tens of thousands have been forced to acknowledge the power of Jesus, and, with the affrighted Bethshemites, to cry, "Who shall stand before this holy Lord God[p]? If then the "Lord is known by the judgments which he executeth[q]," our blessed Saviour has made known in this very way his eternal power and Godhead.]

2. That he will manifest it in his future victories—

[There is a time coming when Jesus shall put forth his almighty power, and "subdue all nations to the obedience of faith." In the words following our text, he declares how extensive shall be his victories, and that all who oppose him shall be as tow before the fire. His victories *here* will be easy, certain, terrible[qq]. But what if we look into the eternal world? O what proofs shall we *there* see of his irresistible, almighty power[r]! Let us be assured of this, that, though we be kings and lords, we must become his subjects; and that, if we will not bow to the seeptre of his grace, "we shall be broken in pieces, as a potter's vessel."]

INFER,

1. How deeply are we concerned to know whether Christ be our King!

[We must not imagine that he is our King, merely because we *profess* ourselves his subjects. We must inquire, Whether we have been translated from the kingdom of Satan, and brought as strangers into the kingdom of Christ[s]? We must also inquire, Whether we are living in obedience to him? For there is nothing more certain, than that "his servants and subjects we are to whom we obey[t]." If we are not *his*, there can be no doubt whose we are: and therefore we should labour to ascertain the point, and to have our evidence clear that "we are Christ's."]

2. How awful will it be to be found amongst his enemies!

["We may be sure, whoever we are, that he will overcome at last: his name is a pledge of universal conquest[u]. And

[oo] 2 Kin. xxi. 13. [p] 1 Sam. vi. 20. [q] Ps. ix. 16.
[qq] Isai. xxv. 10, 11. Ps. vii. 11—13. Deut. xxxii. 41, 42.
[r] Ps. xi. 6. & xxi. 8, 9. [s] Col. i. 13.
[t] Rom. vi. 16. John xv. 14. [u] Rev. xvii. 14. Luke xix. 27.

And how terrible will be the wrath of THE LAMB[x]! O let us kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and we perish from the way[y].]

3. How secure are all his faithful subjects!

[Other kings may be subdued; but He never can: other kings may bring the heaviest calamities upon their subjects; He will bring nothing to them but peace and joy. "None can harm us, if we be his followers." "If He be for us, none can be effectually against us." "Let the Children of Zion therefore be joyful in their King[z]:" yea, to all his subjects we will say, with David, "The Lord is King over all the earth; sing ye praises with understanding[a]."]

[x] Rev. vi. 16. [y] Ps. ii. 12. [z] Ps. cxlix. 2. [a] Ps. xlvii. 7.

MCCXVII.

THE FIRST RESURRECTION.

Rev. xx. 6. *Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection.*

RESPECTING the events spoken of in my text, and which are generally known under the name of *The Millennium*, Commentators have been greatly divided. What has been spoken on the subject by wild enthusiasts, I shall pass over without notice: but the two leading opinions of pious and judicious men may fitly come under our review. Some have thought that there will really be a resurrection of saints and martyrs, who shall again live upon the earth a thousand years, and that the Lord Jesus Christ also will come down from heaven to reign over them during that period. Others conceive the resurrection to be altogether figurative, and that it imports no more, than that for the space of a thousand years there will arise a succession of holy men, resembling the saints and martyrs of former ages; and that the spiritual kingdom of Christ will for that period be established upon the face of the whole earth. I confess that, in my opinion, this latter sentiment is by far the more just and Scriptural; and, feeling that persuasion, I will endeavour to shew you,

I. What

I. What we are to understand by the first resurrection—

The whole of the Book of Revelation is confessedly mystical and figurative; and, if we interpret this passage in a *literal* sense, we make it essentially to differ from every other part. In confirmation of the view which I have of the first resurrection, as being not a literal, but only a mystical and figurative, resurrection, I would observe,

1. That the words do not by any means of necessity require to be taken in a *literal* sense—

[It is well known that a *spiritual* change is often spoken of in the Scriptures as a resurrection from the dead: we are said to be quickened when "dead in trespasses and sins;" and to have "passed thereby from death unto life." In several places, where the terms are quite as strong, or even stronger than those in the text, no one ever thought of putting a *literal* interpretation. When the prophet Hosea says, "Come, and let us return unto the Lord: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up: after two days will he revive us, in the third day *he will raise us up*, and we shall live in his sight[a];" every one understands him as speaking of a *spiritual* resurrection. The language used by the prophet Ezekiel is yet more to our purpose. He represents the Jewish nation as not only dead, but as so long dead, that their very bones are scattered on the earth, and almost pulverized. And he speaks of their bones being re-united, each to its kindred bones, and the whole covered with flesh, and every body animated again by a living spirit which has entered into them, and restored them to life[b]. But did ever any one understand him as speaking of a *literal* resurrection?

It may be said, that, in our text, particular persons are specified, even those who have died as martyrs in the cause of Christ, and that therefore the text must be literally applied to *them*. I answer, that it is not of them *personally* that the Apostle speaks, but of *persons resembling them in mind and spirit*; just as Elijah is said to have come to introduce the Messiah, because John the Baptist "came in the spirit and power of Elias[d]." And, if we make *their* resurrection *personal*, we must then regard the resurrection of *the wicked also* as *personal*, of whom it is said, that, "when the thousand years shall be finished, the rest of the dead will live again[e]." But

[a] Hos. vi. 1, 2. [b] Ezek. xxxvii. 1—10.
[d] Compare Mal. iv. 5. with Matt. xi. 14. & xvii. 12. & Luke i. 17.
[e] ver. 5.

But did ever any one suppose that *the wicked* would rise to live on earth again? Yet, if the *pious* dead, who have been slain by the sword of martyrdom, are *literally* to rise and reign on earth a thousand years, the ungodly dead, who have been slain by the avenging sword of the Almighty, must literally, and in their own persons, rise at the expiration of that time[f].

But shall any, whether the risen martyrs, or others resembling them, live, and reign "a thousand years?" No: there is no reason to think that their lives shall be protracted to any such length: but there shall be a succession of saints during that period: and as that succession will be uninterrupted through that whole time, they are said to live through that time; because, though they do not *personally* live, their piety does live, and is transmitted unimpaired through all the successive generations that shall arise. It is in this sense that the two witnesses who prophesy in sackcloth, are said to "prophesy 1260 prophetic days, or years[g]." It relates not to *their persons*, but to *others* rising in continued succession *in their spirit*, to bear the same testimony. Indeed of them also is it said, that "they were overcome by their enemies and killed; and that their death caused exceeding great joy; but that, after three years and an half, to the utter dismay of their enemies, they rose and lived again[h]." But no one ever imagined, that this was fulfilled literally: every one understands this of a succession of prophets who arose to bear the same testimony as they had borne who had suffered martyrdom for their fidelity: and in the same manner must the resurrection of the saints also, and their reigning for a thousand years, be understood of a continued succession of eminently pious persons reigning with Christ over all the enemies of their salvation; whilst *the ungodly shall have no successors till the expiration of that time.*

In any other sense than this, it would be extremely difficult to make this passage agree with what is spoken of the resurrection in other parts of Scripture; for the resurrection is always represented as taking place all at once, except that the godly will rise first, before those, who shall then be alive upon the earth, shall be changed[i]: but in the sense we have annexed to it, it accords exactly with the language of St. Paul, when he says, "If the casting away of the Jews be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but *life from the dead*[k]?" If it be thought, that this similarity of metaphor will occasion confusion in the sense, let it be remembered,

[f] Compare Rev. xix. 21. & ver. 5. with ver. 4. [g] Rev. xi. 3.
[h] Rev. xi. 7, 10, 11. [i] 1 Cor. xv. 51—53. 1 Thess. iv. 15—17.
[k] Rom. xi. 15.

remembered, that our blessed Lord used the very same terms to express the conversion of souls to him *now*, and their rising again to judgment *in the last day*: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when *the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live* .... Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which *all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth*; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation[1]." Here our Lord distinguishes the two resurrections, both effected by his almighty power; the one upon the souls of men, and the other on their bodies: the one, in order to their reigning with him on earth, (for "they are made kings and priests unto God;") and the other, in order to their reigning with him in glory.

Thus the very terms themselves are best explained in reference to a spiritual resurrection; whilst, if taken in a *literal* sense, they would establish a doctrine not found in any other part of Holy Writ. To all of which I may add, that the text speaks only of their *souls* living, which is never once in all the Scriptures used to designate the resurrection of *the body*.

In confirmation of the foregoing statement, I proceed to observe,]

2. That the event which a literal sense of them would establish, is neither probable nor desirable —

[One cannot conceive that the saints in glory should be brought down from heaven, where their happiness is complete and without alloy, and be placed again in a situation where they must be encompassed with infirmities, and be subjected even to death itself; or that the Saviour should leave his bright abodes, to sojourn here again in a tabernacle of clay for the space of a thousand years. If indeed he had plainly declared such an event, we should most readily submit to his all-wise determinations, and should expect assuredly that he would ultimately be glorified by it: but, when there is no other passage of Scripture that sanctions such an idea; and all similar expressions have confessedly a spiritual import; and the spiritual or figurative sense accords with innumerable other declarations of Holy Writ; I cannot hesitate about the true interpretation of the words, or about the expectations which they teach me to form respecting the glory of the latter day.

In this view of the passage I am confirmed by the circumstances which will take place at the close of the Millennium: "Satan will then be loosed out of his prison, and will go forth to deceive the nations, and to gather them together to

[1] John v. 25, 28, 29.

to battle, the number of whom will be as the sand of the sea. And with these he will compass the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire will come down from God out of heaven to devour them[m]." Now all this I can understand, on the supposition that there be a succession of saints for a thousand years; because I can easily conceive that hypocrites and apostates may at last arise from among them, just as they did from among the immediate converts of the Apostles: but I cannot possibly conceive, either that Satan should so prevail over saints that are brought down from heaven; as to occasion them at last to be cut off by fire from heaven, or that, though preserved faithful to their God, they should ever be subjected to such assaults from men and devils. We are told expressly, that "the sun shall not light on them, nor any heat," and that "they shall have no more sorrow, or crying, or pain:" and therefore I cannot but conclude, that they shall be with Christ in Paradise, till they shall come forth at the last day to be re-united to their bodies, and to possess both in body and soul the inheritance provided for them from the foundation of the world.]

With such a view of the first resurrection, we are prepared to contemplate,

II. The blessedness of those that shall have a part in it—

"Blessed and holy" will they all be; and *that* too in a pre-eminent degree above the saints of other ages:

1. Their views will be more enlarged—

[Our light far surpasses that of the Prophets; insomuch that the least and meanest of the saints under the Christian dispensation excels in that respect even the Baptist himself, who was greater than all the Prophets: and amongst ourselves, some have far deeper and richer views of Divine truth than others. But in that day, the great mystery of Redemption will be exhibited in far brighter colours than it has yet been. Not that any fresh revelation will be vouchsafed to men; for I conceive that the Canon of Scripture is closed: but there will be a more abundant measure of the Spirit poured out upon them, revealing to them the Saviour, in all "the brightness of his glory," and in "the incomprehensible wonders of his love:" "the light of the moon will be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun sevenfold, as the light of seven days, in the day that the Lord bindeth up the breach of his people, and healeth the stroke of their wound[n]."]

2. Their

[m] ver. 7—9.

[n] Isai. xxx. 26.

2. Their graces will be more vigorous—

[They will be "*blessed and holy;*" and blessed, *because* holy. This indeed will be a necessary consequence of the foregoing; for the more "any man beholds the Saviour's glory, the more will he be changed into the same image, from glory to glory, by the Spirit of our God[o]." The whole vineyard of the Lord will *then* be watered more abundantly; and such "showers of blessings" will be poured out upon it, that every plant in it will grow, and "be fruitful in all the fruits of righteousness, to the praise and glory of our God." We may form some idea of their state from what is recorded of the saints on the day of Pentecost: what exalted piety did they manifest towards both God and man! So will it be also in that day: "for brass they will have gold, and for iron silver, and for wood brass, and for stones iron[p]:" and that prayer of the Apostle will in a more ample measure be answered to them; "The God of Peace, that brought again from the dead the Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, will make them perfect in every good work, to do his will, working in them that which is well-pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ[q]."]

3. Their consolations more abundant—

[As their communications from God will be increased, so will their fellowship with him be more intimate and abiding. Their communion with each other also will be most profitable and endearing. Wherever they turn their eyes, they will behold a brother, or a sister, a partaker of the same faith, an heir of the same glory. If even now the communion of the saints be so sweet, that it is almost a foretaste of heaven itself, what will it be in that day, when the loveliness of each, and the disposition of all to exercise the principle of love, will be so greatly augmented? And what will the ordinances be in that day? What, but "the very gate of heaven?" Methinks, the Pentecostal out-pouring of the Spirit will then be a daily occurrence; and the language of earth be like that of heaven, one continued effusion of praise and thanksgiving. The descriptions given of that period in the Scriptures are precisely similar to those which are given of heaven itself; because the state of the Church then will be an emblem, and an earnest, of heaven. So happy will they be in their intercourse with God, that "the sun will be no more their light by day, neither for brightness will the moon give light unto them; but the Lord will be unto them an everlasting light, and their God their glory[r]."]

4. Their

[o] 2 Cor. iii. 18. [p] Isai. lx. 17. [q] Heb. xiii. 20, 21.
[r] Compare Isai. lx. 19. with Rev. xxi. 23. & xxii. 5.

4. Their progress more easy—

[" Satan will then be bound, and sealed up in the bottomless pit, so that he can have no access to harass and deceive them[s]." Now it is well known, that this subtle enemy presents more formidable obstacles in the Christian's way than all other enemies together; as the Apostle says, " We wrestle not with flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers, and spiritual wickedness in high places[t]." How rapid then will be the progress of those who have not this tide to stem, and at the same time are carried forward by breezes the most favourable that heaven can bestow, and amply sufficient to fill all their sails! To this subject we may well apply that beautiful description which the prophet Amos has given of that period; " Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that the ploughman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth seed; and the mountains shall drop wine, and all the hills shall melt[u]:" for in a spiritual, as well as temporal view, so fruitful shall be the seasons, that the blessings of heaven shall almost supersede the labours of cultivation. And all who are bending their course heavenward will fly with the celerity of " doves to their windows," and without interruption, as the clouds of heaven[x].]

5. Their prospects more glorious—

[Breathing thus, as they will do, the atmosphere of heaven, they will be ever ready to take their flight, and to wing their way to their celestial abodes. From the top of Pisgah they will view their promised inheritance: and when the Lord Jesus says, " Behold, I come quickly," the united cry of all will be, " Amen: even so, come, Lord Jesus[y]." In a word, their whole spirit and deportment will evince the presence, and *the reign, of Christ* in all their souls.]

APPLICATION—

But may not this period be anticipated? May we not at least have the commencement of it amongst ourselves? Yes, surely we may. We may assuredly enjoy the dawn of that light, which they will behold in its meridian splendor. With a view to assist you in the noble enterprize of forestalling and anticipating that blessed day, I would say,

1. Improve the privileges which you do enjoy—

[These, let me say, are equal to any that have been enjoyed since the Apostolic age: for the light of the Gospel shines

[s] ver. 2, 3. [t] Eph. vi. 12. [u] Am. ix. 13.
[x] Isai. lx. 8. [y] Rev. xxii. 20.

shines with a splendor unknown to former ages, and is diffusing its rays to an extent which but a few years ago no human Being could have contemplated. Satan indeed exerts his utmost efforts to obstruct the progress of Divine truth; but he cannot succeed: he is foiled in almost every attempt: and his kingdom trembles to its centre. I need go no farther than to you, my Brethren, in proof of what I have asserted. You see how the Lord Jesus Christ is extending his empire, amongst yourselves, as well as in the world at large: and therefore you have every encouragement to fight under his banners, and to expect a successful issue of your warfare. It is worthy of observation, that the saints of the Millennial period have no distinction above you, except that "they shall reign a thousand years;" for over *you* "the second death shall have no power," any more than over *them:* and *you*, as well as *they*, are "priests of God and of Christ[x]." Improve then, I say, your privileges, and seek to attain the graces that will distinguish them: they are characterized by their freedom from the pollutions of the world, and by the fidelity of their adherence to Christ[a]. "Be ye then faithful unto death; and know assuredly that God will give you the crown of life."]

2. Look forward to a still better resurrection—

[We are ready to envy the Millennial saints: but think how much more glorious a resurrection awaits you, than can possibly be enjoyed by embodied souls on earth! *They* will of necessity be subject to infirmities, even in their best estate: but in a little time *you* shall be as free from all infirmity as the angels around the throne of God: your souls shall be altogether perfected after the Divine image, and "your bodies be made like unto Christ's glorious body, according to the mighty working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself[b]." Then "shall you be ever with the Lord," and possess in all its fulness the complete fruition of your God. Look forward with joy to that blissful period; and in the mean time, "Comfort ye one another with these words[c]."]

[x] Compare ver. 6. with 1 Pet. ii. 9.
[a] ver. 4.
[b] Phil. iii. 20, 21.
[c] 1 Thess. iv. 17, 18.

MCCXVIII.

THE HEAVENLY GLORY.

Rev. xxi. 1—6. *And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was*

was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold the tabernacle of God is with men; and he will dwell with them; and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. And He that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write; for these words are true and faithful. And he said unto me, It is done.

THIS passage is supposed by some to refer to the Millennial period. And it is certain that that period is elsewhere spoken of under the image of New heavens, and a New earth[a]. But others interpret it as relating to the eternal world; which sense accords best both with the text and context. Of the Millennial era, it cannot be said that then "all tears shall be wiped away from our eyes, and that there shall be no more death;" for most distressing times will follow it; and, after it, death will proceed in its work of desolation with uninterrupted sway. Moreover, as the state of the wicked in the day of judgment is spoken of in the preceding context, it is reasonable to suppose that the state of the righteous should be mentioned also; whilst, if it be not adverted to in this passage, it is omitted altogether, notwithstanding this Book of Revelation was intended to make known the future destinies of the Church, as well as of the world, to all eternity. Understanding therefore the vision as relating to the eternal world,

I will proceed to consider,

I. The vision itself—

The Apostle saw "a new heaven and a new earth; the first heaven and the first earth having passed away: and, in that new creation, there was no more sea;" all storms and tempests having ceased, and all occasion for tumultuous agitations having for ever vanished.

He

[a] Isai. lxv. 17. & lxvi. 22.

He saw also the holy city, new Jerusalem, that is, a model of it, "coming down from God out of heaven:" and this city was in all respects fitted for the habitation of the Most High God in the midst of all his redeemed people; "its foundations garnished with all manner of precious stones;" "its walls great and high," "its gates of pearl," "its streets of pure gold;" and "God himself and the Lamb enlightening it with their glory[b]." In a word, it was fully "prepared for its glorious inhabitants, as a bride adorned for her husband."

This vision seems to have been somewhat of the same kind with that which had formerly been given to Peter, when "a great sheet, filled with all manner of living animals, descended to him from heaven[c]." But together with it "he heard a great voice out of heaven," proclaiming to him the blessedness of those who should inhabit that holy city. And this calls for our more particular attention.

We see here,

1. The source of that bliss—

[God dwelt, by a visible symbol of his presence, in his Tabernacle and Temple of old. He was in a peculiar manner the God of Israel; and they were in a peculiar manner his people. In his Church, and amongst his true Israel, he dwells also at this time; manifesting himself to them as he does not unto the world; and communicating to them a fulness of all spiritual blessings. And as by this glorious distinction his people of old were elevated above the Heathen, so are his spiritual Israel now distinguished above all other people upon the face of the earth; possessing a knowledge of God's will, an enjoyment of his presence, a sense of his love, and an experience of his power, which no other creature out of heaven does, or can possess.

But in heaven God displays all the full radiance of his glory. He is seen there, not in a mere symbol, like the bright cloud, nor through the dim vision of faith; but clearly, as with our bodily organs we behold the sun in the firmament. Nor are his communications there any longer partial, scanty, and occasional; but constant and full, according to the measure of every one's capacity to receive them.

The consciousness which every one will then have of his interest

[b] ver. 10—23. [c] Acts x. 9—16.

interest in God; of the relation which he bears to him; and of the indissolubleness of that bond which has united him to God; Oh! what a source of joy will this be! But on a subject like this, "we only darken counsel by words without knowledge." We have no conception of the presence of God. A new-born infant is not less capable of appreciating the sublime exercises and enjoyments of spiritual perception, than we are of comprehending the felicity of beholding God face to face.]

2. The perfection of it—

[The *negative* felicity of heaven comes more within the grasp of our feeble minds. We know here, by sad experience, what pain and sorrow mean: and frequent are the occasions on which tears flow down our cheeks. Death too, that king of terrors, warns us of the pains which we shall speedily endure in our conflicts with him. This whole world is little else than a vale of tears. At best it is a checquered scene, and sorrows are continually intermingled with our joys. But in heaven there will be no more pain, or sorrow, or crying: our happiness will be uninterrupted, and without alloy. Nor will there be any termination of it; for "there will be no more death." Whatever tears bedewed our cheeks in our departing hours, they will all be wiped away by God himself; who will, from the instant of our entrance into his presence, seat us on his throne, and put a crown of pure gold upon our head, and invest us with all the glory and felicity of his kingdom. When joy and gladness have thus taken possession of our souls, not only will "sorrow and sighing flee away," but all occasion for them, all scope for the exercise of them, will vanish for ever. O Beloved, what a state will this be! Would to God we were able to speak of it as we ought! But we feel the subject far too great for our feeble grasp.]

Lest this vision should appear to exceed what will ever be realized, let me draw your attention to,

II. The confirmation of it—

"God, in giving us his covenant, confirmed it with an oath, in order that we might have the stronger consolation:" so here, he confirmed this vision to the Apostle by an audible voice, declaring, that the things which he had seen,

1. Were really true—

["Behold, I make all things new. Write; for these words are true and faithful." God would have this vision recorded for the benefit of the Church: nor would he have any

any part of it doubted: for every thing which had been spoken respecting it, was true, and might be fully relied on.

Now this at first sight appears to have been superfluous: but it was in reality no more than what our necessities required. When the soul is bowed down with pains and sorrows, it needs support: and there is no support equal to that which this vision affords. Our trials are but for a time: and eternity is near at hand: and the very troubles which we are called to endure, are subservient to our best interests, and conducive to the augmentation of our happiness to all eternity. Look at the saints of old, and see what supported them in all their trials. What enabled the Patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to leave their country and kindred, and to live as pilgrims and sojourners on the earth? "They looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God[d]." What enabled the martyrs of following ages to sustain their accumulated afflictions? They "looked forward to the Resurrection," when they should possess "a better and an enduring substance[e]." It is to that period that our blessed Lord teaches us to look, as affording us a rich compensation for all that we can now endure for his sake[f]. And it is the prospect of that time which reconciles all the Lord's people to the diversified afflictions of this present life. Hence it was necessary that we should have the fullest testimony respecting the certainty and the excellency of that future state.

Know then, *that* state does indeed await you: know, that "light is sown for the righteous:" and "though weeping may endure for a night, joy will come in the morning."]

2. Were in actual existence—

[The voice which attested the truth of these things, added also, "It is done." The very glory of which the vision spake, is actually begun. Thousands and millions are already in possession of it. What a blessed thought; to those especially who have been bereaved of pious friends or relatives! They are already joined to the general Assembly and Church of the first-born: their spirits are already perfect; perfect in purity, and perfect also in felicity. Think of the dying thief, when, on the very night of his crucifixion, he was received into the presence of his Lord in Paradise! We wonder not that "Paul desired to depart and to be with Christ," accounting that infinitely better than the happiest state on earth. Nor do we wonder that he made light of every thing which stood between him and the consummation of his bliss[g]; and longed for the dissolution of his earthly tabernacle, that he might have

[d] Heb. xi. 10. [e] Heb. x. 34: & xi. 35.
[f] Matt. v. 12. [g] Rom. viii. 18. 2 Cor. v. 1—4.

have it reared anew in that better world[h] — — — Let us only think how near we are to that blissful state, and nothing will be able to damp our ardour, or retard our progress, in the pursuit of it.]

CONTEMPLATE heaven then, I intreat you: Contemplate it,

1. As an object of pursuit—

[What is there in the whole universe that is worthy to be put in competition with it? Oh! blush that you can have your heart engaged about the vanities of time and sense, and that these eternal realities occupy so little of your attention — — —]

2. As an object of expectation—

[Can you really believe that the Lord Jesus Christ has given you a title to this blessedness, and ever be weary in the pursuit of it? The wonder is, how you can be content to live in this poor wretched world, when there is such blessedness awaiting you at your departure from it. Go and survey it from day to day: take Pisgah views of it: anticipate it: get such a sense of God's presence with you, as shall be a foretaste of it: and be daily "looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day," when you yourself shall be privileged to say, "He hath made all things new."]

3. As an object of actual fruition—

[Ask of "those who came out of great tribulation, and washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb, and are now in the immediate presence of their God:" ask them, Whether they regret any labours or sufferings which they ever endured in their way to that bliss. Ask them too, How, with God's help, they would live, if they were again permitted to begin their course on earth? Ask yourselves too, what thoughts you will have of your present conduct, if ever you should reach those realms of bliss? These will be profitable considerations to you: they will place all present things in their just point of view: and will aid you greatly in running the race that is set before you.]

[h] It being delivered on the night of *his late Majesty's funeral*, the audience were here led to contemplate the blessed exchange which his Majesty now experienced. And the same may be done on occasion of any one who *dies in the Lord*. See Rev. xiv. 13.

MCCXIX.

CHRIST THE MORNING-STAR.

Rev. xxii. 16. *I am the root and offspring of David, and the bright and morning-star.*

THE Revelation which had been made to John, contained predictions of an uninterrupted series of events from that time even to the end of the world. They had indeed been made to him through the medium of an angel: but they were nevertheless as certain, as if they had been delivered immediately by God himself; seeing that the angel had received his commission and instructions directly from Jesus, who is "THE LORD OF THE HOLY PROPHETS[a]." It seems to have been with a view to assure John, together with the saints in all succeeding ages, of the truth and certainty of all that had been spoken, that Jesus gave this description of his own character: in which we may see,

I. His personal character—

That Jesus was "the offspring of David," is obvious enough—

[He was to be so according to the Scriptures[b]: and that he was so, both by his father's and his mother's side, the genealogies that are given of him expressly affirm[c]. Indeed Divine Providence so ordered it, that, in consequence of a taxation decreed throughout the Roman Empire in the time of Cesar Augustus, his reputed father was under the necessity of going up to Bethlehem, to be taxed there: by which means there was a public enrolment of the name of Jesus, (who was born there at that time,) as belonging to the house and lineage of David[d]."]

But He was no less "the Root" also of David—

[How this could be, was but little understood, till after the day of Pentecost. Jesus did often speak of himself as God; but still his Disciples did not clearly apprehend his meaning. Yet that the Messiah, who was to be "a Child born and a Son given," was also to be "the Mighty God," even "God with us," was fully and distinctly revealed in the Prophetic Writings[e]. But the most learned of the Jewish Rabbies,

[a] Compare ver. 6. with the text.
[b] Isai. xi. 1.
[c] Matt. i. & Luke iii.
[d] Luke ii. 1—6.
[e] Isai. ix. 6. & Isai. vii. 14. with Matt. i. 23.

Rabbies, when a remarkable prophecy to this effect was adduced from the Psalms by our blessed Lord, were unable to solve the difficulty proposed to them: they could not explain how David's Son could possibly be David's Lord[f]. Nor can our modern Socinians ever return a satisfactory answer to our Lord's question; which can only be answered by acknowledging, that Jesus is God as well as man; the Creator of all things in his Divine nature, though himself a creature according to his human nature. It is in this sense that he was "the Root," at the same time that he was also "the Offspring," of David: and to this agree the most decided testimonies of Holy Writ[g]———]

Our Lord proceeds to mention,

II. His official character—

The voice of prophecy announced him as "a Star that should come out of Jacob[h]." But in our text he designates himself as "the Morning-star." Now it is the office of the Morning-star, not merely to give light, as others do, but to usher in the day: and in this particular view the title assumed by our Lord should be exclusively considered. We observe then, that,

1. By his first rising in the world he introduced the Gospel day—

[Previous to his appearing, there were some faint glimmerings of light, by means of the types and shadows of the Mosaic law: but as soon as he entered on his Ministry, he diffused a light around him; dispelling the mists by which the Pharisees had obscured the law, and exhibiting in his own person a perfect pattern of that obedience which the law required. By his death he accomplished the prophecies, and shewed more clearly what were the designs of God respecting the redemption of the world: and by his resurrection and ascension, and sending down the Holy Ghost to testify of him, he gave to the benighted world the light of perfect day. Then he appeared as "the Day-spring from on high[i]," even as "the Sun of Righteousness, that had arisen with healing in his wings[k]."]

2. By his rising in the heart he now introduces the day of salvation into the soul—

[That

[f] Ps. cx. i. with Matt. xxii. 41—46.
[g] John i. 1, 14. Rom. i. 3, 4. & ix. 5.
[h] Numb. xxiv. 17.
[i] Luke i. 78.
[k] Mal. iv. 2.

[That there is to be a manifestation of Christ to the hearts of men, different from that which is vouchsafed to the unregenerate soul, is certain[l]: and St. Peter speaks of it as "the day-star rising in our hearts[m]." What kind of a manifestation this is, may be conceived from the history of Zaccheus, to whose soul it was made, and who experienced the instantaneous benefits arising from it[n]. This change was by no means peculiar to him; it is wrought in all who truly embrace the Gospel[o], though, in respect of suddenness, it may greatly vary. The distinguishing effect of this manifestation is, that the glorious character of Christ, which was before hidden from the eyes, is now distinctly seen[p]; and he is embraced, as the most valued treasure of the soul[q], the ground of ineffable and eternal joy[r].]

3. By his appearing at the end of the world, he will introduce eternal day—

[He will come again in his glory, and in all the brightness and majesty of the Godhead: and then will all remaining darkness be for ever banished. Now we "know but in part," and "see but as in a glass darkly: but then shall we see face to face." Then all the mysterious designs of God from the beginning will be brought forth to light, together with the reasons of all his dispensations: then will all the perfections of God shine forth with united splendor, not only in the work of Redemption as wrought out by Christ, but in the salvation of every individual amongst his people. And how will the wisdom of a life of godliness then appear! Then indeed will be consummated the happiness of man; and God be glorified in all.]

ADDRESS:

1. To those who have never yet beheld the glory of Christ—

[As in the days of his flesh, so in this day, it is not every one to whom the light comes, that duly apprehends it[s]. Satan is yet successful in blinding the eyes of many[t]. If you have never yet seen Jesus as "fairer than ten thousand and altogether lovely," this is your unhappy state. O pray then that God would open your eyes, and "call you out of darkness into his marvellous light!" Till then you can have no fellowship

[l] John xiv. 21—23.
[m] 2 Pet. i. 9.
[n] Luke xix. 5, 6, 9.
[o] Acts xxvi. 18.
[p] John i. 4, 5, 9, 14. & 2 Cor. iv. 6.
[q] Phil. iii. 7, 8.
[r] 1 Pet. i. 8.
[s] John i. 5, 10, 11.
[t] 2 Cor. iv. 4.

ship with God, nor any hope of acceptance through the blood of Jesus[u].]

2. To those who profess to know and love him—

[Happy is it for you if your profession be justified by your actual experience. But you must remember, that there are many who "*say, they are in the light,* and yet are in darkness even until now;" yea, they "walk in darkness, and *know not whither they go,* because that *darkness hath blinded their eyes.*" Would you know, who are in that state: I answer, All they who, in the midst of a profession of religion, are indulging any of those tempers that are contrary to love and charity[x]. Hear ye this, O ye censorious and uncharitable, ye proud and envious, ye fretful and passionate professors! Talk not of the light ye have in your *heads,* whilst there is darkness in your *hearts.* Can you say of your *tempers,* as well as of your *principles,* "The darkness is past, and the true light now shineth[y]." If not, deceive not your own souls: if you are Children of light indeed, you must walk in the light, "even as Christ himself walked[z]." But, let such be your conduct, and Christ will "give you the morning-star," even the everlasting enjoyment of his presence and glory[a]."]

[u] 1 John i. 6, 7.
[x] 1 John ii. 9—11.
[y] 1 John ii. 8.
[z] 1 Thess. v. 5—8. 1 John ii. 8.
[a] Rev. ii. 28.

MCCXX.

INVITATION TO COME TO CHRIST.

Rev. xxii. 17. *And the Spirit and the Bride say, Come: and let him that heareth say, Come: and let him that is athirst, come: and whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely.*

RICH beyond expression are the blessings held forth to us in the Word of Life: and as free as light are the invitations given us to partake of them. Not only in the epistles to the Seven Churches, and in the other parts of this prophetic book, but throughout the whole Scriptures, is every possible encouragement afforded to the sinners of mankind, to repent of sin, and to "lay hold upon the hope that is set before them" in the Gospel. And here, in the close of the Inspired Volume, are invitations to us reiterated

reiterated from every quarter, that we may be prevailed upon to accept of mercy, ere the door of mercy be for ever closed.

Let us consider,

I. The blessings to which we are invited—

They are here designated by "the water of life." We will notice them,

1. Generally—

[The source from whence this water flows, is no other than the Lord Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world. In the very chapter before us, "the pure river of the water of life" is said to "proceed out of the throne of God and of the Lamb[a]." As in the Wilderness, the water gushing from the rock that had been smitten supplied the necessities of all Israel; so the Lord Jesus Christ, when smitten with the rod of the Law, poured forth the waters of salvation for the benefit of the whole world[b]. He is "the fountain of living waters[c];" and whosoever cometh to him, may drink and live for ever. In the chapter before our text, the Lord Jesus Christ declared this to the apostle John: "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely[d]." In the days of his flesh, he spoke repeatedly to this effect. To the Samaritan woman, of whom he had asked a draught of water, he said, "If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith unto thee, Give me to drink, thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water[e]." On another occasion, when the people had, according to custom, drawn water from the pool of Siloam, he stood in the place of public concourse, and cried, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink: and out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." This latter expression is then explained by the Evangelist, who adds, "This spake He of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive[f]." Now here we have, *in a general view*, the import of the expression in my text. The Holy Spirit is that water of life which Christ is empowered to bestow: and wherever that blessed Spirit is imparted, there is within the person's own bosom a principle of life, seeking for vent in all suitable expressions of duty to God; or, as our Lord elsewhere expresses it, "there is within him a well of water springing up unto everlasting life[g];" to which the Holy Spirit, in all his tendencies and operations, leads us to aspire.]

2. More

[a] ver. 1. [b] 1 Cor. x. 4. [c] Jer. ii. 13. [d] Ch. xxi. 6.
[e] John iv. 10. [f] John vii. 37—39. [g] John iv. 14.

2. More particularly—

[Three blessings in particular I will specify, as granted by our Lord Jesus Christ unto all who come unto him; namely, *pardon*, and *holiness*, and *glory*.

The Lord Jesus will in the first place bestow the *pardon* of our sins. He is said by the prophet to be "the Fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness [h]:" and all who come to wash in that fountain are cleansed from all their sins. In it even "sins of a crimson dye" are made "white as snow [i]:" as it is said, "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin [k]."

For the purposes of *sanctification* also shall this gift be bestowed: for, by the prophet Ezekiel, he says, "I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness and from all your idols will I cleanse you. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and to keep my judgments to do them [l]."

Eternal *glory* also will he confer upon them: for, when they have "washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb, he will lead them unto living fountains of waters [m]," and will cause them to "drink of the rivers of pleasure which are at God's right hand for evermore [n]."]

Let us now turn our attention to,

II. The invitation itself—

Here we cannot but notice the very peculiar urgency and freeness of it—

1. The urgency, to overcome reluctance—

["The Spirit says, Come." The Holy Spirit of God has undertaken the office of revealing Christ to men, and of bringing sinners to Christ for the remission of their sins [o]. He descended visibly on the day of Pentecost for these ends; and by the Ministry of the Apostles, as also by his operation on the souls of men, wrought powerfully upon multitudes, whom he "made willing in the day of his power," and effectually subdued to the obedience of faith. Thus at this time also is he carrying on the work that has been assigned him in the economy of Redemption. In the written word, he speaks to us: by the Ministry of his servants, he pleads with us: by the convictions which he fastens on our mind and conscience, he strives with us individually; if by any means he may constrain us to accept the blessings offered to us in the Gospel. His

[h] Zech. xiii. 1. [i] Isai. i. 18. [k] 1 John i. 7.
[l] Ezek. xxxvi. 25—27. [m] Rev. vii. 14, 16.
[n] Ps. xxxvi. 8. & xvi. 11. [o] John xvi. 8, 14.

His voice to us every day and hour is, "Come," come to Christ as the Saviour of your soul.

"The Bride also says, Come." The Bride is the Church, "the Lamb's wife," who has experienced in her own person all the blessedness of that salvation which she is so desirous of imparting to all around her. The Church of old addressed her Lord, saying, "Draw *me*, and WE will run after thee [p]:" that is, 'Draw *me*, and I will not come alone: I will surely labour to the utmost of my power to make known to others the wonders of thy love, that they also may be partakers of my felicity, and unite with me in honouring and adoring thee.' Thus the Church does in every age. She is "the pillar and ground of the truth [q]," supporting it firmly in the world, and exhibiting, as by public inscriptions that are visible to all, the glory and excellency of the Gospel salvation. She then unites with the Spirit of God in saying to all around her, "Come:" Come to Jesus and see what a Saviour he is. See in *me* what he both can and will do for you also; however far off you may now be, you may draw nigh to him with a full assurance of acceptance with him; and though now "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, you may become fellow-citizens with the saints and of the household of God [r]."

"Let him also that heareth, say, Come." Those to whom the foregoing invitations are announced, should unite their efforts to make them known, and to induce every creature under heaven to accept them. Think not, Brethren, that you have performed your duty when you have heard these invitations from the lips of your Minister; no, nor when you have yourselves complied with his advice. You are all to be Preachers in your own circles; all to repeat to your friends and relatives, your families and dependents, the glad tidings which you hear of a free and full salvation; and, with one heart and one voice, should join in saying to all around you, "Come, come, come." This was the conduct of Andrew and of Philip, when they had found the Saviour [s]; and this must be the conduct of us all, in our respective spheres.]

2. The freeness, to counteract despondency—

["We are all invited to "take of the water of life freely." If we are "athirst," we are the very persons whose names, if I may so speak, are especially written on the cards of invitation. Indeed, if our names had been expressly recorded in this passage, we should not have had a thousandth part of the assurance of God's willingness to accept us that we now have; for there might be other persons of our name: but

[p] Cant. i. 4.
[q] 1 Tim. iii. 15.
[r] Eph. ii. 19.
[s] John i. 40, 41, 43, 45.

but no mourning penitent in the universe can err in tracing his name in the designation that is here given.

It may be, however, that some may say, 'I am not sufficiently athirst to be able to appropriate to myself this character. I should be glad indeed to obtain mercy of the Lord; but I do not pant after it as the hart after the water-brooks, and therefore I have not in myself the qualification that is here required.' To counteract such desponding fears, the Saviour says, "*Whosoever will*, let him take of the water of life freely." If you have not all the *thirst* that you can wish, have you the *inclination?* have you the *desire?* Then you are the person invited: and you must not dream of staying till you can bring certain qualifications along with you, but come and take these blessings "*freely*, without money and without price[t]."]

To impress this subject the more deeply on your minds, let me ADDRESS a few words,

1. To the reluctant—

[Many are the excuses which you urge for your declining the invitation sent you in the Gospel: and to you they appear perhaps sufficient to justify your refusal. But your Lord and Saviour will not be deceived: he sees the radical indisposition of your mind to the blessings which he offers you; and will say of you, as he did in reference to those of old, "They shall never taste of my supper[u]." You may be offering a variety of pleas: but he will put the true construction on them all, "Ye *will* not come unto me that ye may have life[x]." O think, how bitterly you will regret your present conduct, when you shall see unnumbered myriads, who were once as far off from him as you now are, sitting down at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, and you yourselves be cast out into outer darkness! What weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth will you then experience to all eternity[y]! How will those words sound in your ears at the last day, "Often would I have gathered thee, as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings; but ye would not[z]!" Do but reflect on this one moment,—"*I would*; and *ye would not.*" Verily, that reflection will constitute the very summit of your misery in hell. I pray you, hold not out any longer against the urgent invitations which are now sent you; but come unto the Saviour, and accept the Rest which he has promised to all that are weary and heavy-laden.]

2. To the desponding—.

[What can the Saviour add to convince you of his willingness

[t] Isai. lv. 1. [u] Luke xiv. 16—24. [x] John v. 40.
[y] Matt. viii. 11, 12. [z] Matt. xxiii. 37.

ingness to accept and bless you? Perhaps you will say, 'I have tried to come to him, and I cannot: and I have tried so long, that I think it in vain to entertain a hope of final success.' Is this the case? Then hear what the Saviour says to you by the prophet Isaiah: When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them: I will open rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of the valleys: I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water[a]. Now I cannot conceive a case more desperate than that which is here depicted: The person is in himself "poor and needy." (There you will easily recognize your own character.) He has "sought for water," even for the waters of salvation. (That represents what you also profess to have done.) He has "found none." (There is your unhappy lot painted with the utmost precision.) "His tongue faileth for thirst;" so that he is ready to sink in utter despair. (What can you add to that, to bring it home more fully to your own case?) Yet this is *the very person for whom God has reserved his blessings, and to whom he engages to impart them.* 'But I am in such a state, that it is almost impossible to deliver me: you might as well expect a river to be running over the highest mountains, as for the waters of Salvation to reach me.' Is that the case? says the Saviour: then "*I will open rivers in high places*; I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water." See here, my Brethren, what wonderful condescension there is in your Lord and Saviour, that he will so describe your case, that it should not be possible for you to fail in recognizing your own character, or to doubt any longer his ability and willingness to save you. Take then this passage; and rely upon it; and plead it with him; and expect the accomplishment of it to your own soul. Then shall "your light rise in obscurity, and your darkness be as the noon-day[b]." You shall find that the Saviour is not "a fountain sealed[c]," but "a fountain opened[d];" and "out of that well of salvation you shall drink water with joy" for evermore[e].]

[a] Isai. xli. 17, 18. [b] Isai. lviii. 10. [c] Cant. iv. 12.
[d] Ps. xxxvi. 9. Joel iii. 18. [e] Isai. xii. 3.

MCCXXI.

THE PERFECTION AND SANCTITY OF THE HOLY SCRIPTURES.

Rev. xxii. 18, 19. *I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: and, if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.*

THE voice of Inspiration carrying with it the authority of Jehovah, it might be expected, that persons, eager to establish particular sentiments of their own, or to draw disciples after them, would profess to have received revelations from heaven, that so they might obtain a more entire and extended influence over their adherents. To prevent such impositions under the Mosaic dispensation, God said to the whole of Israel, "Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it[a]." In like manner, at the close of the Christian dispensation, our Lord directed his servant John to record this solemn declaration: "I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: and, if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy; God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book."

In its primary sense, this declaration seems to refer to the particular book which contains the Revelation of St. John: but, as this book completes and closes the Sacred Canon, I consider the warning as extending to the whole of the New-Testament Scriptures; and as making known to us,

I. The perfection of the Scriptures—

That may be considered as perfect, to which nothing

[a] Deut. iv. 2.

thing can be added, and from which nothing can be withdrawn. Now the Scriptures, in this view of them, are perfect: for there is nothing in them either superfluous or defective. They are perfect,

1. As a Revelation from God—

[That they might discover to us many things which are at present either altogether hid, or but obscurely revealed, is certain; but they have made known to us all that we are concerned to know? and the secret counsels, which, if revealed, would have only administered to our pride, are better hidden from our view. Indeed, God has hidden many things on purpose, that, whilst we behold much which he alone could reveal, we may be constrained to humble ourselves before him as creatures who are altogether indebted to him for all the light they enjoy, and dependent on him for the instruction which they hope yet farther to receive. In the holy Scriptures, Jehovah displays, as it were, before our eyes, all his glorious perfections, and opens to us his eternal purposes, especially respecting the redemption of the world by the incarnation and death of his only begotten Son. In them too, the person, work, and offices of Christ are all set before us; and that with such plainness that we cannot err, and with such a weight of evidence that we cannot doubt.]

2. As a directory to us—

[In this view also they are perfect: for whilst, on the one hand, there is nothing revealed for the mere purpose of gratifying our curiosity; so, on the other hand, there is nothing withheld that could in any way conduce to the welfare of our souls. Respecting the whole of spiritual life, we have all the instruction that can be desired. The manner in which that life is imparted, and carried on unto perfection, is so fully delineated, that there is nothing wanting either for our direction or encouragement. And for our behaviour towards men, there is a path marked out for us in general principles, which are applicable to every situation and circumstance in which we can be placed; and it is yet further traced out to us in examples, which serve to illustrate every virtue which we can be called to exercise. Nor have we any cause to complain that the rules were not more minute and numerous: for to have made a specific rule for every possible case would have been of no service, because the Scriptures would have been so voluminous, that a whole life of study would not have been sufficient to make us acquainted with them: but by laying down a few general principles, and embodying them in living examples, God has given us all the information that we can need. In every relation of life, whether as husbands or wives, parents

or

or children, masters or servants, magistrates or subjects, we have rules laid down for us, from which we cannot greatly deviate, if only we implore of God the guidance of his good Spirit. Only "let our eye be single, and our whole body will be full of light."]

In the prohibition to add to, or take from, the holy Scriptures, we also behold,

II. Their sanctity—

Nothing can exceed the strictness with which the smallest alteration of God's blessed word is forbidden—

[If we add to the Inspired Writings, God will lay on us all the plagues which are there denounced against sin and sinners: and, if we take from them, "God will take away our part from the book of life," and never suffer us to taste any of those blessings which they hold forth in rich abundance to the upright soul. In many other places we read of specific judgments denounced against sin; but in no place are the denunciations of God's wrath so full and comprehensive as in the passage before us. It was necessary that a fiery sword should be thus waved before our eyes, to prevent us from trespassing on that hallowed ground: and though some slight alterations might seem allowable for the purpose of accommodating the expressions of Scripture more to our own apprehensions or desires, yet will God on no account suffer us to suppress or add one single word.]

Nor is the severity of the prohibition at all more alarming than the occasion requires—

[In no other way can we offer a greater insult to God, or do a greater injury to man, than by erasing what God has spoken, or by obtruding any conceits of our own under the sanction of his authority. If we presume to leave out any thing which God has revealed, what is it but an impeachment of his wisdom in revealing it? And if we presume to add any thing to his word, what is it but a denial of his goodness, in withholding from us information which he ought to have communicated? And both in the one case and the other, it is a most impious imposition upon man, whom we defraud by our concealment of the truth, or deceive by substituting our own fallible dogmas in the place of it.

When Moses made the tabernacle, this solemn injunction was repeatedly given to him; "See thou make all things according to the pattern shewn to thee in the Mount." And it would have been at his peril to have deviated in any respect from it; because the whole structure, together with all the fur-

furniture thereof, was typical of things which were to be more fully revealed under the Christian dispensation: and any departure from the instructions given him would have destroyed the beauty and harmony of the whole. So will it be at our peril to change or modify any part of that system which God has revealed in his word. We must take the whole simply as we have received it, and not in any respect presume to be wise above what is written.]

The prohibition to alter the Scriptures yet farther marks,

III. The reverence due to them—

If we are not to change the word of Scripture, neither are we to elude its force. On the contrary, we are to maintain the strictest jealousy over ourselves, that we make not any portion of the Inspired Writings void, but that we adhere to them with the utmost possible fidelity,

1. In our exposition of their import—

[It is perfectly surprising to see with what unhallowed boldness many will put their own construction upon God's blessed word, denying its plainest import, and annexing to it a sense totally contrary to its most obvious meaning. To what a fearful extent this liberty has been taken by Papists is well known: but, to the shame of Protestants, I must confess, that in this guilt they also participate to a great extent. Nor do I here speak of those only, who fearlessly expunge those parts of Scripture which are hostile to their views, but of those adverse parties in the Church, who, whilst they profess to reverence the whole of the Inspired Volume, wrest and pervert its plainest assertions, in order to maintain a system of their own. This it is that has introduced endless dissentions, divisions, and bitter animosities into the Church of Christ. Men have adopted sentiments of their own, instead of submitting to be taught of God; and then they have laboured, by forced constructions and ingenious criticisms, to make the Scriptures accord with their views. The different parties all see and condemn this disingenuousness in their adversaries, whilst yet, without remorse, they practise it themselves. In truth, so fettered are the great mass even of teachers themselves by human systems, that there are scarcely any to be found, who will dare to give to the whole of Scripture its true import, and to bring forward in their Ministrations all that God has spoken in his word: and so vitiated is the taste of the generality of their hearers, that scarely any

any would be found to approve of this fidelity, even if it were exercised towards them. The pious Reformers of the Established Church were of a different mind; they have faithfully declared to us the whole counsel of God: but amongst their degenerate children there are few who follow their example; almost all having ranged themselves as partisans of opposite and contending opinions, instead of conforming themselves simply to the declarations of Holy Writ. But I hope the time is not far distant, when ALL *the Articles of our Church* will be *equally* esteemed, and EVERY *truth of Scripture* be impartially brought forward in our public Ministrations.]

2. In our submission to their authority—

[To every part of God's blessed word we should bow with meek submission; not regarding any doctrine as "an hard saying," or doubting the truth of it because it exceeds our comprehension. We are but children; and, as children, we should receive with implicit reverence whatever has been spoken by our heavenly Instructor. And if with simplicity of mind we receive the first principles of the Oracles of God, we shall have our understandings progressively enlarged, and be gradually guided into all truth. In relation to those things which we do not at present understand, we should be content to say, "What I know not now, I shall know hereafter."

So likewise, in reference to the commands of God; no one of them should be considered as "grievous," but all be viewed as "holy, and just, and good." To explain them away, or to lower them to the standard of our own attainments, is criminal in a high degree. We should have no wish but to be conformed to the mind and will of God, and to have our whole souls poured, as it were, into the mould of his Gospel. As far as respects the impiety of the act, it matters very little whether we change *the words* or *the sense* of the holy Scriptures: in either case we greatly offend God, and entail on ourselves all the judgments that are denounced against us in the text.]

APPLICATION—

[The words immediately following my text may well serve to enforce every word that has been spoken. It is the Lord Jesus Christ himself who "testifies of these things," and who, to impress them the more deeply on our minds, says, "Surely, I come, quickly." He will come quickly: and whatever he has spoken shall surely come to pass; not one jot or tittle of it shall ever fail. We may now take away from his word, or add to it, as seemeth us good; but in that day, his word shall stand; and his judgments

ments be dispensed in perfect accordance with it. We may deceive others by our perversions of Scripture, and may even deceive ourselves: but him we cannot deceive: nor, when he shall pass sentence on us for our temerity, shall we be able to elude his vengeance. I pray you then to regard the Scriptures with the veneration that is due to them. Imagine not that they were given us for the purpose of displaying our skill in controversy; though I deny not but that we ought to combat error, and to contend earnestly for the faith delivered to the saints: but the Inspired Volume is holy ground: and we should "put off our shoes," as it were, whenever we enter upon it, and implore help from God, that we may be enabled to "receive it with meekness as an engrafted word," and find it effectual to save our souls.]

END OF VOL. XI.

GENERAL INDEX

TO THE

HORÆ HOMILETICÆ.

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IN THE

HORÆ HOMILETICÆ.

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SCHOOL OF INDUSTRY.

473.

SOCIETIES:

BENEFIT; OR SAVING BANKS.

422.

BENEVOLENT.

326, 670, 714, 870, 941, 997, 1144.

BIBLE.

339, 559, 595, 596, 627, 670, 908, 1077, 1089, 1090, 1097.

FOR THE SUPPRESSION OF VICE.

96, 110, 125, 147, 262, 363, 554, 670, 860.

VISITING.

305, 326, 353, 941, 943, 977, 997, 1097, 1131.

SERMONS

WRITTEN IN THE WAY OF PERPETUAL APPLICATION.

552, 639.

SPITAL.—(See CHARITY.)

575, 891.

SUNDAY SCHOOLS.

45, 78, 133, 155, 233, 245, 270, 282, 670, 730, 908, 1021, 1089.

THANKSGIVING:

FOR DELIVERANCE FROM AFFLICTION.

346, 395, 399, 403, 405, 414, 423, 541, 755.

GENERAL.

574, 595.

FOR PEACE.

196, 261, 302, 420, 428, 635.

FOR VICTORY.

16, 196, 276, 302, 493.

TRINITY SUNDAY.

1, 23, 400, 739, 762, 817, 860, 911, 1078, 1093, 1154, 1192.

VISITATION.

113, 296, 301, 504, 508, 554, 576, 585, 726, 760, 764, 765, 878, 885, 889, 895, 933, 941, 950, 955, 956, 982, 986, 998, 1004, 1011, 1024, 1028, 1050, 1061, 1064, 1094, 1109, 1135, 1153.

WEDDING.

29, 537, 918, 1034.

WHITSUNDAY.

91, 273, 408, 426, 514, 525, 533, 646, 658, 762, 809, 830, 831, 851, 853, 854, 860, 923, 924, 968, 969, 980, 1019, 1029, 1070, 1142.

YOUNG PEOPLE.

233, 245, 282, 352, 392, 441, 449, 478, 479, 514, 730, 916, 1021.

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